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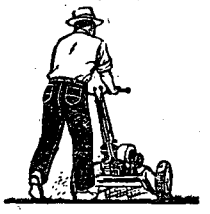

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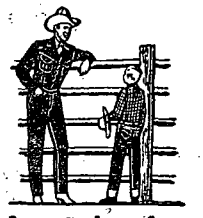

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25¢ FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

Vol. 4 SEPTEMBER, 1950 No. 3

Book-Length Novel

POLARIS AND THE GODDESS GLORIAN ..... **Charles B. Stilson** 10

Not yet in the stars of Polaris was there charted a homeward voyage, as he had thought when the cruiser Minnetonka sailed away from mystic Sardanes. For there beckoned from the waves a weird Golden Man, calling the intrepid son of the snows from his first chosen course, to an incredibly ancient country, and into the strange thralldom of a woman—or was she goddess?—Glorian of Ruthar. . . .

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Short Stories

FRIEND ISLAND ..... **Francis Stevens** 110

What kind of yarns will sea-women spin when women take to running ships of the line? Hearken to the tale of the Ancient Mariness, as astounding as any yet spun of the trackless seas!

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MIMIC ..... **Donald A. Wollheim** 118

He walked alone in the dawn and the dusk, and no one knew his name. But the day he perished and the way he perished—a world will never forget!

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WHAT DO YOU THINK? 6

IN THE NEXT ISSUE 67

Cover by Saunders. Inside illustrations by Paul and Lawrence.

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Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

THE EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Readers:

Going over the letters for publication, which you are about to read, I have noticed that some readers approve of using the more recent classics of the Munsey line-up, and others insist that they want the older and oldest ones instead. Thus, it seems a happy medium will please the most people. In the issue you are reading, you have an oldie that everyone asked for, and one of the best of the stories from Popular Publications' magazine, *Astonishing Stories;* namely "Mimic" by Donald Wollheim.

In this connection, it seems a good time to bring out, occasionally, a story from either *Super Science* or *Astonishing*, that has been asked for by the readers, along with the Munsey short stories still to be republished, such as "The Lost Road to Yesterday" by Garret Smith, or the remainder of the E. B. Mason classics.

The next novel to come, "The Hothouse World," by Fred MacIsaac, is one of the "greats" of the middle period—neither old nor new—and has been anxiously requested by many readers.

Sincerely,
Mary Gnaedinger.

MAY ISSUE JUST RIGHT

Dear Mary Gnaedinger:

If the May issue of *Fantastic Novels* is a good sample of what is in store for us, well, your sales should increase 100 fold. It was an issue to be proud of. Eric North's story was as good as any Merritt and better than any story by Taine. Every character in the story seems so real that I feel that I actually lived every part. That is the type of tale I like. If ever a tale

(Continued on page 8)

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 6)

belonged in a Hall of Fame "Three Against the Stars" does. Finlay's illos were also very fine. Of course he is always at his best, it seems, in your mags.

The best of the short stories was "From Time's Dawn." It was just as superb as Paul's pics. I love these animal tales. You can publish any amount of them that you wish. There is one special one that I wish that you would try to print. It is called "Morgo, The Mighty." It was published in the *old Popular*.

"Earth's Last Citadel" should really be good. I love Kuttner. And Moore is also swell.

I read your article in the 100th issue of *Fantasy-Times*. I was glad to see that you are going to print some of Lovecraft's stories, with Bok illustrating, in F.F.M. We have been crying for them for a long time. Also I was pleasantly surprised to see that "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" was to be printed. Now this completes the trilogy.

Your fantasy mags have always been tops with me and they still are.

I am still hunting for someone who has "Slan," and "The Outsider" for sale fairly cheap. I also want some of Taine's books. Anyone who has any of these can drop me a line.

Yours as long as you publish,

ROGER NELSON.

627 Robinson,
San Diego 3, Calif.

ABOUT PAUL'S ILLOS

Of the past several issues of all three of your fantasy mags, this May copy of F.N. is the first one wherein the long novel wins first place in my scorebook. Eric North is good, and I think Finlay did a fine job, especially on page 37, as an instance of drawing the half-seen, half impossible biogens. None could do it better! Virgil Finlay has very bad habit of giving us scenes not at all connected with the story. Like the two nightmarish things making motions over a kettle on page 27. If only he would give us more actual scenes such as Frank Paul does so well.

"Three Against The Stars" would have been shorter if the homelife at the Murgles and Joe Murgle's letters were deleted, but they were worth reading, too. Eric North created a real wonder and awe in me for the biogens. The battle between good and evil was classic! Reminded me somewhat of certain parts of "The Blind Spot" by Homer Eon Flint and Austin Hall, which you printed long ago.

What Finlay did for the novel, Paul did for "From Time's Dawn," by B. Wallis. This, the second best, was improved immensely by Paul's work. The cut on page 97 inspires sickening horror of the vermin and pity for the little burros.

"A Priest of Quiche" was only a little better than "Mr. Primrose Goes to the Devil," and both were good. The only thing I didn't like was the book reviews. I think they could be

(Continued on page 117)

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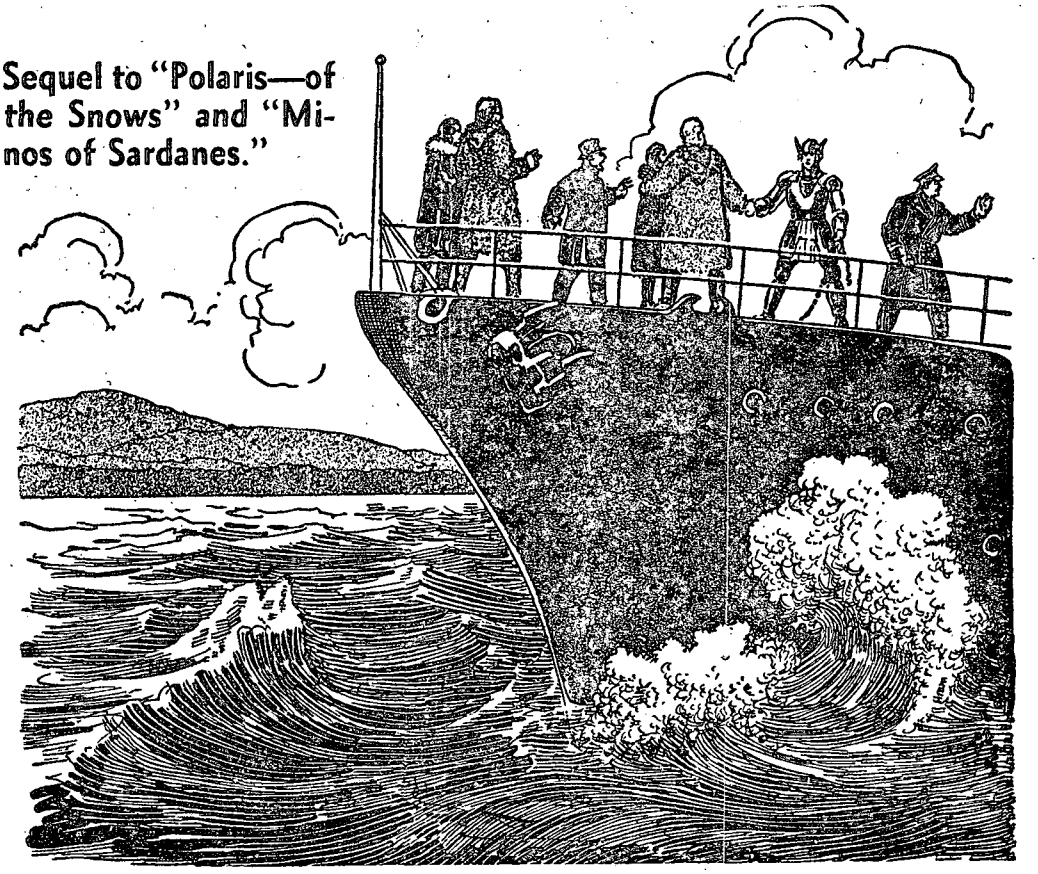
Introduction

IN THE antarctic wilds far below Ross Sea, Polaris Janess (Polaris—of the Snows), was born, of a mother he never knew, and grew to manhood's years knowing one human face only, that of his father. When that father died, the young man set his face to the north, to find the world of men, of which his father and his books had told him; and to deliver to the National Geographic Society in Washington a packet containing scientific data compiled by his explorer sire.

Journeying through the silent wastes with his dog team, the son of the snows found Rose Emer, an American heiress, who had strayed from an exploring party, and who waited death in the icy wilderness.

Sequel to "Polaris—of the Snows" and "Minos of Sardanes."



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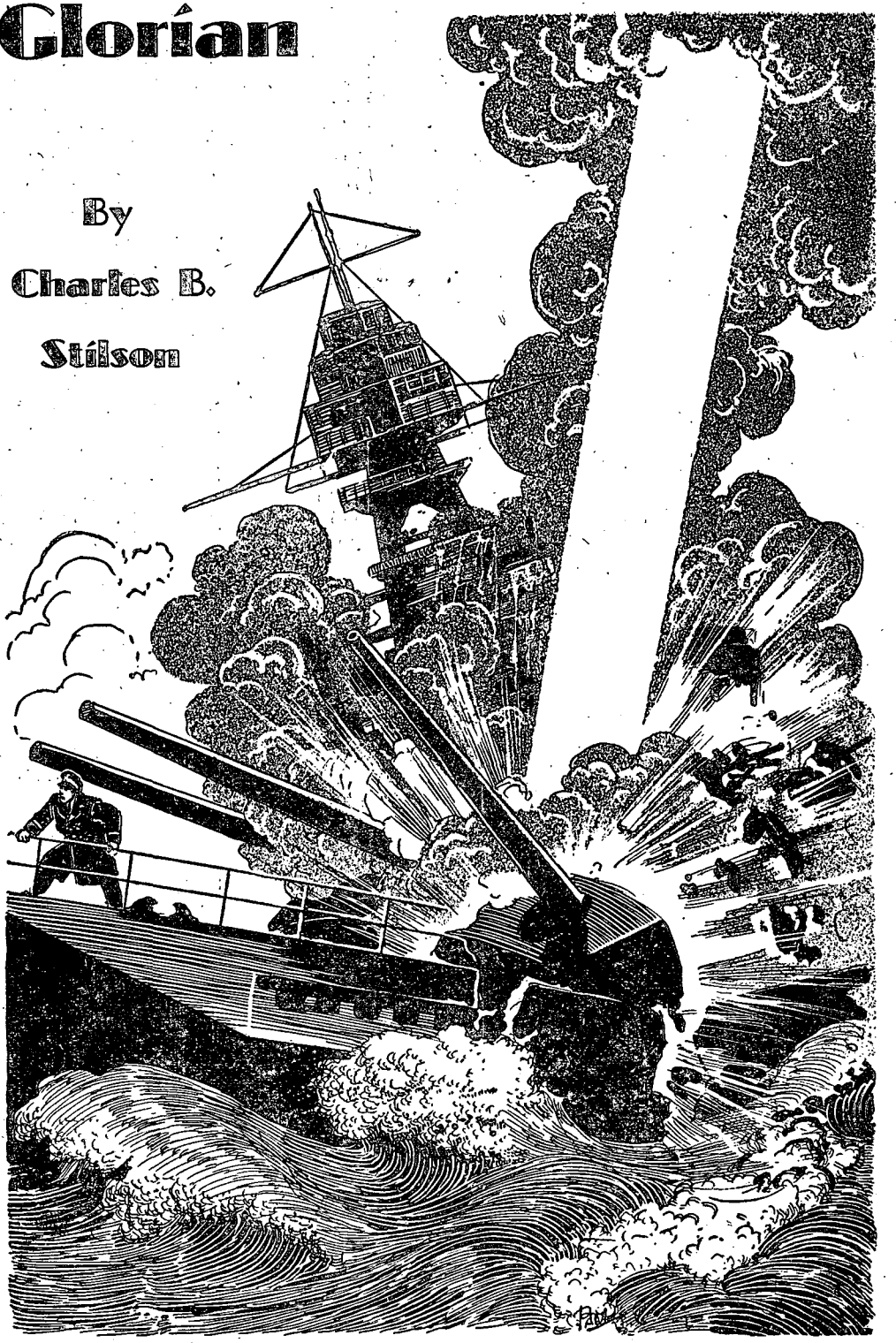
Glorian

By Charles B. Stilson



The pillar of light moved, destroying everything it touched.

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Hurled southward again in a breakup of the ice floes where they had camped, Polaris and the girl came upon the kingdom of Sardanes—a valley girded by volcanic hills which warmed it, and peopled by a lost fragment, some two thousand strong, of the ancient Greeks.

The adventures of the man of the snows and the American maid in Sardanes; how they escaped thence; how their love bloomed amid the eternal snows; and how they won at last to America, where the Geographic Society hailed the dead Stephen Janess as the first man to set foot on the Southern Pole—all these things have been related.

Zenas Wright, friend of Polaris's father, and a celebrated student of volcanic phenomena, told Polaris that the fires which had warmed Sardanes for centuries were passing away from the valley, and that all life in the ancient kingdom must perish.

Chartering the United States second-class cruiser *Minnetonka*, Polaris, Wright, and Captain James Scoland set sail to rescue the Sardanians. Scoland, who loved Rose Emer, deserted Janess and Wright in the wilderness and went back to America to woo the Rose-maid. But Rose Emer refused him, and gray Marcus, Polaris's dog, protected her from Scoland's profaning lips and tore the recreant captain so horribly that the man went mad, and in his madness revealed his inhuman treachery.

Again the *Minnetonka* turned her nose to the mysterious South, and Rose Emer went down the bitter seas to find her sweetheart.

Meanwhile Polaris and old Zenas Wright found Sardanes a waste of snows, its volcanic girdle cold and dead, its people, led by the mad priest of Analos, gone to their doom through the fiery "Gateway" of their god Hephaistos. Only Minos, the kind, and his bride, the Lady Memene, remained alive, hidden in a cave in the hills. Those four, Polaris, Wright, and the two Sardanians, were picked up by the *Minnetonka* near the Antarctic Circle as they were making their perilous way northward in a small launch which they had found in the wreck of Captain Scoland's supply ship.

In the story which follows will be related the tale which was brought back to America by old Zenas Wright—what befell Polaris and his companions after the *Minnetonka* turned northward—homeward.

CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN STRANGER

ON THE bridge of the cruiser *Minnetonka* stood Minos, the Sardanian king, staring southward in the wake of the ship, southward where his lost, dead kingdom lay buried under the soft, cruel snows beyond the unchartered antarctic seas. Ahead of the ship, full of promise, full of hope, was America. For the *Minnetonka* had rounded the Horn that morning and was on her long straight course for the port of home.

Below him, in her cabin, was the girl bride of Minos, the Lady Memene, so strangely won and saved from the crowning horror of his kingdom's fall. It was mid-forenoon of a cloudless day. Gay voices echoed along the decks of the cruiser. Gladness was in the very air the voyagers breathed—the gladness of the homeward-bound.

But the mien of the king was somber. There was a shadow on his brow and deeper shadows in his dark eyes gazing so steadily into the south. Bright as were his prospects, memory still whispered sadly to him of the only spot on earth which had been home to him. He could not forget.

Far away on the dancing, sparkling waters something caught the eye of the king, a something which flashed and disappeared and flashed again, as the wave on which it rode dipped and arose among its fellows. Minos watched it curiously.

Leaning against the rail beside the king, so close that their elbows almost touched, was Lieutenant Irwin Everson, commander of the *Minnetonka*, trim in his naval blue. Minos touched his shoulder and said:

"Yonder—something shines on the water."

Everson followed with his eyes the course indicated by the pointing finger of the king. Again the distant object flashed in the sunlight, far away on the starboard quarter. "Might be ice; but I've seen enough of that lately to know that it isn't," muttered Everson as he, too, caught the flash, "and no wave ever shone like that."

Stepping into the pilothouse, the lieutenant returned with his glasses. Their lenses revealed to his eyes a glittering patch from which the rays of the sun were reflected as it rose and fell with the waves. But even the powerful binoculars were inadequate to distinguish the form and substance of the thing.

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"I can't make it out," Everson said as he lowered the glasses. "But here comes the keenest pair of eyes on the ship." He leaned from the bridge and called down to a tall man who was crossing the deck below.

"Oh, Mr. Janess! Can you spare us a moment? We need your eyesight."

Polaris turned a smiling face in response to the call. He, too, was glad of the homegoing; no man on the ship more so. In a moment he joined the king and the lieutenant on the bridge.

Though he was not so tall by the breadth of a hand as the Sardanian, who was indeed a giant, the tawny head of the son of the snows was inches above that of the young naval man. As they stood one on either side of him, Everson involuntarily stepped back a pace. He felt puny and absurd, and he was by no means a small man.

For the half of a minute, Janess gazed through the glasses, altering their focus slightly. He lowered them suddenly and swung on his heel to face Everson.

"Put the ship—" He stopped and his face flushed. "I beg pardon," he continued. "It is not mine to give orders, but yonder a man floats. He lies face downward across a piece of wreckage."

Lieutenant Everson hurried into the pilot house, and down to old MacKechnie among his boilers was flashed the signal which swung the gray cruiser off her course in a long arc to the southward.

"A man, you say?" the commander queried as he rejoined Polaris and the king. "But what is it that glitters so?"

Polaris, with the glasses at his eyes again, did not at once reply. When he did, the answer was surprising.

"It is the man that glitters. If he be not of metal himself, then is he clothed in it from head to toe, and it glimmers—" He turned to Minos and lapsed into the Greek of Sardanes. "It glimmers, Minos, as did that suit of armor which thou didst leave behind thee in the cave on the Mount of Latmos," he said.

The king stirred to quick interest. The eyes of the naval lieutenant widened with amazement as Polaris repeated his remark in English.

"A man clothed in metal! In armor!" he exclaimed. "And floating here in the South Atlantic! What can that mean? Poor chap; whoever he is, he will never tell us. He must have been dead for days. But it's well worth the investigation."

Impatiently the three men stood at the rail of the bridge as the ship swung on.

AT AN eighteen-knot clip, the *Minnetonka* cut swiftly through the waves, nearer and nearer to the flashing burden of the waves. Soon other eyes not so keen as those of Polaris could descry the strange objective of the ship. Forward along the rail, sailors clustered, shouting their surprise, and staring at the unusual spectacle of the glittering man afloat.

Presently, with a deep thrumming of her valves, the *Minnetonka* slowed down. With a word to Everson, Polaris left the bridge and hastened across the deck. As a boat was swung over the side in the davits, he sprang into it with the sailors. Less than two-score strokes of the oars took the boat alongside the floating mystery.

Then, indeed, had the sailors cause to stare with open mouths.

On a crisscross tangle of slender beams, oddly twisted and broken, lay the body of a man. So small was the raft of wreckage which supported him that his head and feet projected at each side, and as the waves tossed his unstable craft, first his face and then his heels were dipped beneath the water. Very wide of shoulder was the stranger and powerfully framed, if the outlines of the garb he wore did not belie him.

From crown to sole he was dressed in jointed armor, cunningly fashioned and decorated, and the whole of which gleamed in the sunlight as only burnished copper or red gold can gleam. His hands only were bare; smooth, strong hands, clenched fast about two of the broken beams beneath him.

But it was none of those things, and they were strange enough, that caused the coxswain to cry out hoarsely as the boat wore alongside, or that caused Polaris Janess, bent over with outstretched hands, to draw them back from the floating stranger, while his lips parted and his breath came hard.

"He's alive! By the grace of God, he's alive!" cried the coxswain.

Face downward the stranger lay, as Polaris had said, loose-flung and inert, and sprawled as though some force had pitched him there. But though his head was more often under the water than above it, his broad shoulders heaved and fell regularly. He was alive.

The supreme wonder of it, and that which awed Polaris and the sailors, was that *the man breathed when his head was under water!*

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When a wave tilted the raft so that his face was raised, his breath was expelled with a wheezing, whistling sound. When he was submerged, a stream of small bubbles arose about his neck and clung to the surface of his metal helmet.

For a long moment Polaris stood and looked down at this amazing thing. Then he reached out and very gently took the stranger by the shoulders to turn his face to the sky. So tight was the clutch of those strong bare hands about the two beams of the raft which they held that the entire structure tipped when the son of the snows laid hold. In vain he tried to loosen that grasp. It was not to be done without breaking the man's fingers. To make an end of it, Janess took an axe from the hands of the coxswain and cut through the beams.

Still gripping the wooden fragments, the man turned over on his back.

Then the mystery of the stranger's breathing was partially made clear. Under the flare of the helmet he wore his brow was hidden. His eyes were fast closed. Fitting tightly over the bridge of his nose and extending down so that it covered his mouth and part of his chin, was a projecting masklike contrivance of metal and leather. Its straps covered the man's ears and were made fast somewhere at the back of his head under the helmet. So tightly was the mask affixed that its straps cut into the flesh of the man's cheeks. It much resembled the masks worn by the soldiers in modern warfare to protect themselves from the gas attacks of their enemy.

Through its mechanism the breath of its wearer hissed and whistled like escaping steam.

Alive though the man was, and under circumstances which made his discoverers marvel, he was near death. Above and below the confines of the mask he wore, the bones of his face seemed almost thrusting through the flesh. The flesh itself was wasted and puckered by the action of the sea water, and the skin was cracked and raw. His hands, which clung so tenaciously to the bits of broken wood, were bleeding about the nails, and his wrists were gashed and water-eaten.

"Now, here is work for Dr. Marsey," Polaris said. He gathered the limp form of the stranger into his arms and lifted him into the boat.

At the rail of the *Minnetonka* as the boat was shipped, a curious crowd met the advent of the man from the sea. Carrying him as lightly as though he had been a child, Polaris laid the man on the deck. The ship's doctor pushed through the wondering sailors and bent over him.

"Not dead?" he exclaimed when he saw the stranger's face. "A most amazing thing!"

"What resurrection from antiquity have we here?" said old Zenas Wright, falling on his knees beside Polaris, who was supporting the man's head. "No museum I ever saw boasted a suit of armor like this one." The scientist ran a finger over the delicate tracery on the glittering corselet of the stranger.

Polaris sought and found the catch which released the chin strap and laid the open helmet on the deck. Another chorus of exclamations greeted the appearance of the stranger's head. It was covered with a mass of wavy red hair, so red that it shone like flames in the sunlight.

Rumors of the wonder on deck had drawn the grizzled MacKechnie up from his beloved engines.

"Mark me, yon laddie's a Scot—if he isna' of the wild Irish," was his dry comment when he saw the fiery head on the deck.

Undoing its buckle, Janess next laid aside the odd mask from the face of the stranger. Except that he had a high, bold nose and a mouth that closed in a thin, firm line, little could be made of the features of the man, they were so damaged by his long immersion in the sea and impressed by the tightly drawn trappings of the mask. But he apparently was a young man, of not more than thirty years.

In vain Dr. Marsey endeavored to force the man's clenched teeth apart so that he might apply the neck of the brandy flask which a steward had fetched. The jaw of the stranger was set like a rock and resisted all effort, and the doctor was compelled to pour the liquor between the locked teeth.

"If that doesna' fetch him, nothing whatever will," said MacKechnie, the nostrils of his ruddy old nose twitching.

"Ah, he's getting it!" said Zenas Wright. With the first trickle of the brandy down his throat, the unconscious man stirred faintly. His mouth opened and closed again with a snap, and his hands unclenched and let fall the bits of beams they had held so long. He coughed weakly. A faint tinge of color flowed into his face. His eyelids twitched, but did not open.

Dr. Marsey touched the man's temples and then his wrists with practised fingers.

"I think that we shall hear his story

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yet," he said. "What he needs now is a bed and nourishment. Bring him below."

Polaris looked into the battered face and was strangely stirred. The grim plight of the man he had rescued, the mystery of him, the strength of the spirit that seemed to dominate even that unconscious body; all struck an answering chord in the nature of the son of the snows. For he, too, had suffered and endured, almost to the gates of death, and had remained steadfast. Was it a premonition that made him feel so strongly that this man, should he live, would be his friend above many?

When the sailors would have taken up the stranger, Polaris waved them aside, and himself carried the inert body below, the blazing head resting on his shoulder.

MacKechnie gazed after him thoughtfully as he strode across the deck.

"Beware, laddie lad, beware!" the Scotchman muttered softly. "'Tis only ill luck he'll be bringin' to ye, yon gowden mon. For ye hae saved him from the sea."

SHIVERING throughout the length of her steel hull, the *Minnetonka* drove southward. A shrieking wilderness of wind and wave surrounded the ship. Reft from all guidance, she sheared through the furious waters with no more of volition than some monster projectile launched by the battling elements. Twice had the stout cruiser come free of scathe from the white portals of the Antarctic. Now she seemed winged by death to enter them once more and forever. In the grip of the tempest the ship was no more than a toy—a helpless, beaten thing.

Calamity, like a black dog, had crept hard upon the heels of the bizarre stranger. He had not been on the cruiser for six hours when a storm burst, the like of which for violence no man on board the ship ever had seen.

In an attempt to breast the gale and make for some port of safety, one of the propeller shafts—weakened perhaps by the pounding of the ice-drift months before—had snapped short off. Unequal to the double task, its twin had sprung beyond all use. Thereafter the scant mercy of chance ruled the destinies of the ship and of all she bore.

Nor was the damage to the shafting all that disaster had wrought. In her great peril the ship was stricken dumb and could not summon aid. Her wireless was out of commission. She could send no call across the face of the waters to sister ships, bidding them to hasten to her succor.

MacKechnie's dismal prophecy was likely to be visited, not on Polaris Janess alone, but upon the entire ship's company.

In the pilothouse, with the gale screeching outside his windows, Lieutenant Everson bent above his charts; but he was helpless and well-nigh hopeless. Down in the engine room, its busy clamor stilled, MacKechnie sat and stared bitterly at the mechanism which he so loved. It was useless now, its splendid powers crippled, its fires dying away to embers. If the inward prayers of the engineer were fervent, the flow of Scotch profanity which passed his lips at whiles was far more eloquent. He, too, was helpless. He cursed the day when he had decided with Everson to round the Horn and take the eastern route. They had learned at Dunedin, in New Zealand, that the Panama Canal was closed by another Culebra slide, and they had thought that this was the quicker way to the port of home.

Better the delay than this!

On all the ship two hearts only were unshaken by the catastrophe. One was that of the stranger.

Freed of his armor, his body cleared and his scarred face and arms in bandages, he lay tossing in a bunk in one of the cabins. Dr. Marsey was unremitting in his care of the patient whom the sea had given him. Hot gruel and small doses of brandy, administered alternately, had turned the ebbing tide of the man's vitality. He was gathering strength. But his consciousness still strayed beyond the powers of any tempest to disturb it.

Another who thought nothing of the gale and its accompanying terrors was Zenas Wright.

Coupled with his keen and scientific mind, there was in the old geologist the enthusiasm of a boy, and an overmastering curiosity to learn new things. Many and wild had been the guesses which had followed the finding of the red-haired stranger. That he had been shipwrecked was plain enough to all. But who and what was he?

Some star out of *opéra-bouffe*, said one, out of a job and reduced to the necessity of wearing one of his own costumes. A lunatic, another said, and found more to agree with him. But whence the armor and the mask?

Let guessers guess and tempests roar, said Zenas Wright to himself. He was on the trail of knowledge. So he slipped into the cabin where the stranger lay. He stood at the head of the bunk and looked down

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where the red hair of the derelict flared on the pillow. The impressions left by the straps of his mask had filled out, and the lineaments of the man were more distinguishable than they had been. It was an agreeable face, thought Zenas Wright; all of it that the bandages did not hide. There were distinct lines of humor at the corners of the straight mouth and tiny wrinkles at the base of the craggy nose—lines which said that the wearer of them was a hearty fellow, who ofttimes had laughed long and merrily at jokes, whether of his own or another's making.

"But," thought Zenas to himself, "Marsey's been giving the fellow altogether too much brandy, or else he is in a rare fever." The geologist laid the back of his hand to the man's cheek. He found it cool. But it was ruddy to the ears, with the ruddiness that is associated with an intimate camaraderie with the wine cups.

At the touch of the old man's fingers, the stranger ceased his tossing. His eyes opened. One flash from them Zenas Wright caught, and he saw that they were sea-blue, bright and leaping eyes. Then their lids closed. The man shook his head wearily, and from his lips trembled what might have been a moan or a muttered word. The scientist bent hastily to listen, but the man made no further sound. As the old man watched him, his form relaxed and he lay apparently in a dreamless, voiceless slumber.

FROM the floor, Wright took up the shining helmet, and from a stand the queerly fashioned mask. He was about to leave the cabin when his attention was arrested by the garb which the stranger had worn underneath his armor and which was flung across the back of a chair. One garment it was, even to the feet of it, like the sleeping suit of a child. It was of a soft, fine fabric, almost of the thinness of gauze, yet firmly and closely woven and warm to the feel. But it was neither of cotton nor of wool, nor yet of silk, or any other material with which the scientist was familiar.

He shook his head over it; and then, with the mask and helmet, he left the cabin.

Straight to the deserted ship's laboratory the geologist went, and shut himself in. And there, some time afterward, Polaris, threading his way through the swaying corridors with Rose Emer clinging to his arm, found him.

So busy with his work was old Zenas that he did not see or hear the entrance of Janess and the girl. For a time they stood in silence and watched him. They saw him spill drops from a vial on the surface of the helmet. Then he went at it with a small drill which he had fetched from the machine shop. That was a bit of hard work, for he puffed and mopped his brow. He collected with care the particles which fell under the bite of the drill. Those he tested with drops from another bottle, and then again, opening and discarding a number of chemicals. At length he got a reaction which appeared to satisfy him, for he chirruped gleefully and nodded his white old head.

Next Wright donned the mask and fastened its straps. Polaris and Rose heard the whistling of his breath through it. He then drew a bucket of water from a tap, set it on one of the laboratory stands, ascended a stool, and suddenly plunged his head into the pail.

Zenas had not stopped to figure out the displacement of the container of a well-developed scientific brain. It was considerable. Much of the water splashed out on the floor, and not a little of it went down inside the scientist's collar. Nothing daunted by the cold trickle of the inundation, he bravely kept his head in the bucket, from which arose at once a prodigious gurgling and bubbling.

The old man's shoulders shook as though a fit of coughing had seized him. One minute, two, three, passed. Zenas stood so still that Polaris became alarmed. He stepped to the geologist's side and shook him by the arm. The only response he got was an impatient gesture of a hand, which seemed to say, "Go away and don't bother me."

Presently Wright raised his head from the depths of the bucket, and ludicrous enough he looked, with the odd snout of the mask projecting from his face, his white thatch of hair all plastered flat and the water running from his beard and making a mess of his cravat and shirt front. But above the mask his little dark eyes were triumphant. When he saw Polaris at his side, he could scarcely wait to unfasten the mask.

"There," he shouted, and he shook the thing above his head, "there is one of the greatest inventions of modern times. I don't know what is in the inside of it, or just what it does, but I'll find out. If that chap yonder is the inventor of it, he can take it to the United States, take out a patent on it and make a scandalous amount of dollars, and we can all become

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human submarines. How long was I down?"

"About five minutes, Daddy Wright," said the girl, who had taken a strong liking to the plucky old geologist and his bluff ways.

"Five minutes!" Wright's tones were awestruck. "And I took every breath regularly and naturally, except when I had to sneeze! And it was real oxygen I got, too. Not a drop of water came through this thing, and it was very good breathing. Well, I've made two discoveries."

"And those are?" Polaris questioned.

"That our friend yonder with the red topknot can live under the water like a fish, *and that he wears armor of gold which makes a light in the dark.* Look here."

Wright took up the open helmet. Stepping to the switch, he shut off the lights in the laboratory.

Faintly at first, and then strongly and more strongly, the helmet glowed in the darkness. The light grew, until the two men and the girl, standing close together, could dimly see each other's faces.

It was uncanny, this strange metal headpiece with its fan-shaped crest, all luminous with a flickering and phosphorescent radiance.

"What does it?" Rose Emer whispered, the tempest for the time forgotten.

Zenas Wright turned on the lights.

"I cannot tell," he replied. "But if it's not radium, it is something that is closely akin to radium. The outer surface of the helmet is of gold. I've tested it with acids. The gold is laid—not plated, but laid on thickly—over an inner shell of steel. And finely tempered steel it is, too, as my drill will bear me witness. But the light comes from still another metal, which is inlaid upon the tracery in the gold here."

He turned the helmet in his hands. Over all of its surfaces were the fine lines of a design of twining vinery, with here and there small, conventionally shaped flowers. In the lines of the chasing was inlaid, as Wright had said, another metal. It seemed to be a reddish and rusty dust, which clung in the surface of the gold along all of the lines of the graven design. It was that which made the light.

"That chap over there is no actor, and he's not a crazy man," said the geologist earnestly; "but an enigma that I'm going to solve, if the good Lord will give me the time. We had on this ship before he came two survivors of a history to make an archeologist weep tears of joy. Now we have a third, and, to my mind, more wonderful even than are they!

"Boy—" He turned and clapped Polaris on the shoulder. "I only hope that I shall live long enough to pen the 'finis' to the book that I'm going to write some day!"

FOR seven days, fraught with perils through every passing hour, the hurricane belabored the staggering ship. South by southeast, the storm drove her on. The whip of the gale and the shock of the mighty waves which arose to meet its lash were incessant.

Past the Falklands, their rocky headlands dimly seen through the flying scud; past the Aurora Island group, and on past lonely Georgia, the hard-pressed *Minnetonka* fled down the raging sea path under the goads of the storm demons. Nowhere might she tarry. Candlemas Island and Saunders and Montague in turn were left behind, and then Thule, last link between the South Atlantic and the frigid wastes of the Antartic Sea.

Off the adamant cliffs of far Thule the cruiser nearly left her bones. She struck a hidden rock, struck so fiercely that the massive steel ram was torn from her prow, and with it the triple rails, with which she had been equipped to withstand the ice-shocks, in her antarctic voyage, were stripped from her entire starboard side.

When Thule had disappeared in the murk, the swing of the tempest turned, and the cruiser was forced eastward in a whirling race of current and gale. Like a smitten thing that seeks a lonesome spot in which to die, the ship passed on into the mysteries of the uncharted, treacherous seas which lie east by south from Thule.

Helpless still the cruiser rode. Unable to make repairs to her shafting, Lieutenant Everson did the only thing that he could do; he kept her head-on with the seas and let her run before the tempest.

Through all those days and nights of peril the stranger lay in his cabin. His consciousness had returned, and at times he sat up and gazed curiously at those who visited him; but he seemed to be in a mental haze. He ate heartily of what was given to him, and his strength grew. He spoke to no one.

Among the men on the *Minnetonka* were those who, one or another, were conversant in nearly all of the languages of the civilized world. One by one they were called in by Zenas Wright to try their tongues on the stranger. He met them all with blank looks, sometimes with smiles; but he an-

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swered none. He seemed to comprehend none.

Polaris visited the cabin often. His liking for the man grew. He imagined that the stranger was more cordial to him than to any of those who attended him. Once or twice the son of the snows surprised a wistful regard in the bright blue eyes of the man, an expression that was lost almost as soon as perceived. And once the stranger reached Janess's hand and held it with his own for a moment, turning it and feeling of its wonderful thews with his fingers. It was then that he seemed the nearest to speech. Presently he let the hand fall with a smile and a flash of white teeth.

It was after that last disaster, off the hard coasts of Thule, that Engineer Ian MacKechnie went quite daft.

What had come upon the ship had seemed to numb the Scotchman. By day and by night he sat in his silent engine room beside the lifeless boilers, his cold pipe clenched between his set teeth, his lips working. Occasionally he stumped heavily up the steel stairways to the decks. His stays above were brief always, and always he returned to the engine room. When he slept at all, it was only to nod in his chair. Before his bloodshot eyes strange fantasies played themselves through, and were sequeled in his fitful dreams. Always, they had the same grisly climax.

In one of the night watches the old man appeared on the cruiser's bridge. Everson, almost as sleepless as the engineer, was in the pilothouse. The fury of the gale had subsided somewhat; but it still roared on with a vigor that chilled the strong heart of the commander. He saw the engineer as he came onto the bridge, and went out to speak to him.

"Meester Everson," MacKechnie said, raising his voice to a shout to cope with the shrieking clamor of the storm, "Meester Everson, wull ye do a strange act and save the bonnie ship and a'?"

"Why, what is it, Mac? What do you advise now?" the lieutenant asked.

"'Tis you mon that the laddie plucked from the sea," replied MacKechnie. "Wull ye no gi' orders to cast him o'er the side again, and save the ship?"

Everson answered with a short laugh. "This is a poor time for joking, Mac," he said.

"'Tisna' jokin' wi' me, Meester Everson," MacKechnie said. His tones were deadly earnest. "Yon's no' a proper mon, whatever. He's one that has sorely angered the big sea, and the deep rages mightily for him. If ye dinna gi' him up, we'll all be ganging our way wi' him, down to auld Davy Jones." His voice rose shrilly. "I'm fey," he cried. "I'm fey, and I hae the secon' seeght! Heed me, mon!"

Everson shifted his position so that he got the light from the pilothouse full on MacKechnie's face. It was drawn and wild-eyed.

"You're a superstitious fool, Mac," the lieutenant said. "You had better go below and turn in. You look as though you had not had a wink in a week."

"Supersteetious! Aye, mon, maybe, and a fu' to bootie," rejoined the Scot. "And I've been havin' no sleep, I grant ye. Ma certes, how can a mon sleep wi' *him* glarin' and glommerin' yonder i' the engine room? Heave him o'er the side, I'm tullin' ye, Meester Everson, as was done wi' the prophet Jonah. 'Tis the only way whatever to save the ship.

"Supersteetious! An' are ye no supersteetious yer ain sel', Meester Everson? Haven't I seen that ye always throw the deuces fra' yer hand when ye play for siller at poker? I tull ye, yon's a deuce-mon. He mustna' remain. Think it o'er, laddie; think it o'er. When ye hae seen what I hae seen—"

He turned away, and the rest of his words were lost in the skirl of the wind. Suddenly he backed up, clutching at the bridge rail and colliding violently with Everson.

"See! See!" he screamed. "He's comin' for me the noo! I lockit him fast i' the great kist i' the boiler room; but such as him are na' held by bolts or bars. He's comin' for me!"

Moaning in abject terror, MacKechnie went down on his knees. He pointed at the decks below with a trembling arm.

Everson looked in the direction indicated by the shaking finger of the Scot.

A LIGHT hung at the foot of the bridge ladder. In the patch of radiance it made, stood the stranger. He was dressed from head to foot in his golden armor. His helm was on his head, and the whole flashed and shimmered in the rays from the lamp.

As Everson stared at him, the man turned away from the foot of the ladder and walked to the rail of the ship. There he stood gazing out into the darkness and the storm.

Unnerved by the sudden appearance of

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the object of their discussion, Everson hesitated for a moment. Then he started for the ladder to descend to the deck. MacKechnie, his teeth chattering with fright, laid hold of the lieutenant by the leg, but Everson shook off his grasp and went on. As the commander set foot on the ladder, the stranger quit the rail and came back toward the bridge.

Everson, halfway down the ladder, called sharply as the man came opposite him. But the stranger did not pause or look up. He passed the bridge with steady steps and crossed the deck toward the main companionway. The lieutenant was about to proceed to the deck and follow, when a wild and wailing cry behind him, piercing above the booming of the seas, halted his step. He turned.

It was MacKechnie who had screamed. He was on his feet and coming along the bridge. In the set face of the Scot was a look of such frozen horror that it shook the lieutenant. With eyes glaring straight ahead, the engineer passed Everson by as though he did not see him, descended the ladder to the deck, and walked to the rail. He paused where the stranger had stood only a moment before. He raised his hand as if to strike at some shape visible to him alone. Again he cried out wildly.

Before Everson could move to stay him, the Scot climbed the rail and threw himself into the sea.

Shouting to the men of the watch to fetch lanterns, Everson ran aft along the side. It was useless. The crazed MacKechnie, whirled away in a raging swirl of waters in which no man could live, was gone beyond their ken. No cry came back to his fellows from the blackness. Only the wind roared and the tortured waters thundered. In the plight of the ship it was impossible even to attempt to pick up the lost man.

Far aft Everson clung to the rail, dazed, stunned at the suddenness of his old comrade's taking off. Knowing that he could do nothing to save the mad Scotchman, the lieutenant at length turned back and went below, to the cabin of the stranger. He threw open the door. The cabin was dark, except where the curious armor shed its glow along the floor. For that phenomenon Everson was prepared. Zenas Wright had told him of the luminous metal. What did surprise the lieutenant was that the armor lay on the floor. And so recently he had seen it on the cruiser's deck, and its owner inside of it. To that he could swear. He turned on a light.

The stranger lay quietly in his bunk, apparently in slumber, his broad chest rising and falling regularly. Not the flicker of an eyelid betrayed that he was conscious of the keen scrutiny which the commander bent upon him. Almost then did Everson give way to the superstitious imaginings of MacKechnie. Then his searching eyes saw the gleam of drops of sea water which beaded the golden corselet and helm. He drew a long breath of relief; for he knew that he had not dreamed. Pursuing his investigations no further, the lieutenant returned to his vigil on the bridge.

Next day, to the gratification of Dr. Marsey and to the general surprise of the others on the ship, the stranger left his cabin. Clothing had been provided for him, but he would have none of it and appeared on the deck clad in his armor. He proved to be an exceedingly curious man, the stranger. He went everywhere about the ship, apparently in fear of nothing, although the gale still ran high. He watched all of the operations of seamanship with the closest interest, but was careful to get in the way of no one.

His ruddy face and flaming hair, with the outer trappings which he wore, made the man the object of much comment on the part of the sailors of the *Minnetonka;* comment which was not untinged with awe. All of that he heeded not at all. In the full possession of his faculties, he still was speechless. What communication anyone on the ship had with him was by means of signs, and that necessarily was limited. He took his meals with those who shared the officers' mess. Although it evidently was unfamiliar to him, he was quick to observe and to imitate the table etiquette of his companions.

Only Everson was not surprised at his appearance. The lieutenant kept his counsel and waited.

Word of the mad act of MacKechnie went abroad through the ship, spread by the men of the watch. Among the sailors, superstitious after the manner of their kind, grew a hostility to the strange man, an enmity that became more and more pronounced as the hours brought to the cruiser no relief from the battering of the elements. So strong did the feeling grow that Lieutenant Everson feared for the safety of the man, and told Polaris of it. Thereafter the son of the snows constituted himself a bodyguard for the stranger in his wanderings about the ship, and remained with him as much as possible. Zenas Wright, too, watched over his prize

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with the jealous zeal of a proper scientist.

Not for worlds would the explorer allow this living conundrum to come to harm until he had solved him. The old man continually plied the stranger with English words, pointing out to him their equivalents and seeking to encourage speech. For, unless the man might be taught to talk, Zenas felt that his chances of learning more of him were slim indeed.

To all of those advances the man answered with smiles only. He was very courteous, extremely good-natured, but beyond the ring of silence which he had drawn about himself, he would not or could not go.

Everson was little surprised, although he was mightily angered, when, on the third day following the death of MacKechnie, he was waited upon by a delegation of his sailors with a demand that the stranger be sent from the ship. They did not ask his death—merely that he be set adrift in one of the cruiser's small boats. A sea was running in which such a craft could not survive for two minutes.

Shamefacedly, but sullenly, the men listened to the stern rebuke of their commander. When they had left him reluctantly—and their ears must have tingled to his opinions of their superstitions—Everson redoubled his precautions for the safety of the stranger. The lieutenant was morally certain that at the first opportunity that should offer, an "accident" would befall the man from the sea.

Abruptly as it had struck, the storm of wind subsided. It was succeeded by a torrential downpour of rain. The cruiser was left tossing on a choppy sea. Dead ahead to the south was land—what land, no one on the ship could say. A scant five miles away it loomed up before them through the mists and the driving rain, a long and towering coastline, the peaks of its frowning cliffs almost touching the low-rolling clouds.

In this, the first respite from many hours of perils, Lieutenant Everson at once set about the task of repairing his crippled ship.

Then the crown was placed upon the work of calamity.

LASHED no longer by the flail of the tempest, the *Minnetonka* was laid to. Hope returned to those who rode upon her. Those who gathered on her decks were almost gay again.

For the first time in many days the two Sardanians came up from their cabin. The Lady Memene had proved a poor sailor, and in her deathly illness that came of the buffeting of the ship, Minos never had left her side, but had nursed her with all the tenderness of a woman. The king remembered well a time, not long before, when he had lain near death, and her soft hands had soothed him, and her care had kept the spark of life within him.

It was nearly noon. Chatting of their experiences in the storm, and laughing at their appearance in the oilskins which they wore against the rain, a little group gathered on the forward deck of the cruiser. Almost it seemed that the hand of fate collected and placed them there. Polaris Janess and Rose Emer, the Sardanians, old Zenas Wright, and Ensign Willis Brooks, a happy-go-lucky youth of large dimensions and an inexhaustible supply of good spirits, who was the second in command on the *Minnetonka,* made up the party.

Presently Lieutenant Everson, his repair work well under way, came up from below and joined the others. Dr. Marsey might have been with them also, but the kindly physician delayed below to attend one of the engineers who lay ill of a fever. Before he had finished his ministrations, the stroke fell which was so strangely to alter the life course of every one of that party, and the good doctor was too late to be numbered among them.

Almost on the heels of Everson the red-haired stranger ascended the companionway. With his armor on as usual, but dangling his helmet and his mask from his hand, he clanked across the deck, all unheedful of the anathemas that the sailors mouthed as he stalked past them.

From the port in his cabin he, too, had seen the new land that lay ahead. He strode by the group on the forward deck, but his eyes were not for them. Ever watchful, Zenas Wright noted that the mien of the stranger was curiously excited. His blue eyes gleamed. His lips were parted. Something seemed deeply to concern him. He stood at the rail and studied the looming coastline long and searchingly. In his face was the rapt expression of the man who greets again a well-loved friend after an absence of many days. From the shore he turned his eyes to the sea and scrutinized it keenly.

Zenas Wright, watching, started. What was the man about? Was he signaling? And whom? The explorer took a hasty step toward the rail to investigate.

Beneath his feet he felt the deck of the

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cruiser heave like the breast of an unquiet sleeper. A terrific roar burst from the bowels of the ship, and she quivered in every plate of steel and oaken beam.

"The magazine!" cried Everson. The commander dashed for the companionway, but he never reached it.

Amidships the decks heaved up and opened in a yawning wound that rent the cruiser almost from rail to rail. Through the gap shot skyward an immense column of smoke, laced with spurts of flame, and spread fanwise many feet in the air. With it there ascended a mass of débris torn from the vitals of the ship. For yards around the waves splashed to the fall of the splintered wreckage. The swaying decks were littered with it. And some of the fragments were of steel and iron that clanged as they fell, and others were horrible shreds of men, and made no clangor.

Paralyzed in his tracks, his eyes distended, his very flesh stirring from his bones at the horror of it, Everson faced the wraith of ruin that arose in his path. A new manifestation tore speech from his lips.

"Look!" he shouted aloud in a strained and unnatural voice. "My God, look! *The color!*"

In the heart and center of the standing column of smoke, seen faintly at first and then in blazing brilliance, towered a mighty pillar of light. But it was not like any light that any of those who gazed upon it had ever known. For it was neither of red nor white, nor yet of violet, yellow, or green, or any other color or hue of the solar spectrum. Radiant, scintillant, indescribably beautiful, it thrust up through the murk of disaster steadily and cruelly as the flaming sword of an unkind fate. It was this that had pierced the ship and exploded the magazine.

Zenas Wright, who had looked unshaken on many strange things, looked upon this and cried out, even as had Everson:

"The color! A new color! Impossible; yet it *is!*"

With chaos and death linked together and roaring in front of him, the old man, true scientist to the last, bent his eyes on the flaming pillar in a challenging and analytical stare. If this was to be his final vision, why, he would learn what he might from it before he went into the shadow where all learning is valueless.

Like painted puppets carved from wood, the men and women on the deck stood and gazed at the appalling ruin of that fell

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"

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disaster. It was only a moment in the happening, but a moment that bore the burden of many moments in its intensity.

THE pillar of light moved, and those that watched saw that everything that it touched it destroyed. It swayed toward them, and the deck crumpled away before its advance. It swung back. In its path was one of the massive steel turrets of the cruiser. The light played against it. The turret tottered; the steel of it seemed to melt and disintegrate. The entire structure crumbled and crashed down, disappearing through the gash in the decking. With the fall of the turret the light vanished also.

From the companionway came the horrid remnant of a man who crossed the deck to Everson. One of his arms had been torn away between the wrist and elbow. His features were blackened and marred beyond recognition. An eye was gone. His clothing hung about him in tatters, and the tatters were burning. He halted in front of the lieutenant and raised the maimed arm; from which the blood was spurting, in the semblance of a salute.

"The ship—sinks. The—sea—on fire."

He croaked the words brokenly, and fell, and died at the feet of his commander.

Up through the gap in her bottom surged the seawater, and the ship began to settle. The *Minnetonka* was sinking.

Everson pulled himself out of the daze which in that moment of dread had benumbed his faculties. A glance he gave to the settling decks and the useless boats. He had neither men nor the time to unship them.

He turned to his companions.

"Those who have prayers to say had best say them; for this is the end of our traveling," he said simply. Suiting his action to the words, he knelt on the deck.

At the side of Polaris Janess appeared the red-haired stranger. As he had once before, he now caught up the hand of the son of the snows. Holding it, he looked into Polaris's face and smiled, a fearless and whimsical smile.

"A strong hand, my brother, strong to hold a kingdom. This is not your death that is coming. I will save you and these with you. I promise," he said—and the marvel to Polaris and to the others was that the man who before had been speechless now spoke readily and in excellent English.

Not waiting for the answer, which, in his surprise, Polaris was slow to give, the stranger left his side and ran across the deck. He strapped his odd mask over his face, clapped his helmet on his head and fastened it. He caught up from the deck a length of steel chain. With a run and a leap, he was gone—over the fast settling rail and into the sea.

Scarcely had the golden helmet disappeared over the side when the waves crossed the decks to meet the water that was spouting from the interior of the cruiser.

"A madman!" Polaris muttered. He turned and gathered Rose Emer in his arms. She clung to him, sobbing softly.

"Be brave, dear heart," he whispered. "It isn't hard to die, and wherever we are going, we shall go together."

Around them rose the waves.

Held fast in the swirl of the sinking ship, every soul on the *Minnetonka* went down with her. From Everson, kneeling on his deck, to the lowliest coal-passer in the depths of the cruiser, there was no man but bowed his face to the waters.

Clasping his sweetheart with one arm, Polaris struck out fiercely. For a moment he cherished the hope that he might keep to the surface and reach the land beyond. But the suction of the sinking ship was too strong for even his giant strength. He saw the others, his friends struggling about him. The water came between his dear lady's face and his. He strove to reach her lips with his own. His lungs seemed bursting. His senses swayed.

Through the green waters he saw a great golden shape like a globe approaching him. Another fantasy. Strong hands gripped him. They, too, must be dreams.

The blackness became absolute.

CHAPTER II

THE LONG BLACK ROAD TO ADLAZ

IN ILLIMITABLE darkness a spark glowed and lived, and the soul of Polaris Janess awoke and once more knew it was a soul. The silence of oblivion was broken by a roaring as of a thousand mighty rivers torrenting on their courses far underground. One by one the man endured the tortures that those must endure who come back from the claim of the sea. Slowly and with exquisite agony came the consciousness that his body still lived—an agony so keen that he fain would have wrenched himself free of the flesh and departed it. Fire, liquid and intolerable, raced through his every vein and artery. His head, no longer tenanted by a brain, it

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seemed, was a vast and empty cavern, through which wild winds moaned.

An age it was in seeming that the soul fought its way through travail, back to command of the faculties it had quitted, until it had regained the mastery of its two provinces, the brain and the body. The fiery rivers were quenched. The winds ceased their roaring. With a groan and a shudder the son of the snows once more took up the burden of living. Weak and dizzy and deathly sick, he opened his eyes.

He lay on a soft bed of furs in a small and swaying room. Almost at his elbow he heard the splash of waves against metal walls. Above him, an expression of sympathy and concern on his ruddy face, bent the red-haired stranger.

When he saw the eyes of Polaris quiver open, the man smiled, a rare and winning smile.

"Now, by the four rivers," he said, "I am glad to see you return to the living. So long did you tarry in the beyond that I thought that I had lost you."

For a moment Polaris gazed into that rubicund countenance in bewilderment, but for a moment only. With the floods of life came memory. He tried to spring to his feet, but the struggle in the water and the nausea of his returning vitality had sapped the strength from him. He fell weakly back. The look he bent upon the stranger was poignant with its question.

"Rose—the Rose-maid? Where is she?" he gasped, wresting the words out painfully.

With a graceful gesture, the stranger drew to one side and pointed across the room.

"Your lady? She is there," he said.

On the other side of the room, only a few feet away, was another couch, similar to the one on which Polaris had found himself. Rose Emer lay upon it. The oilskins she had worn were in a crumpled heap upon the floor. Her gown, sodden with sea-water, clung to her limbs. A careful hand had partly covered her with the folds of a robe of soft, dark furs. The coils of her long, chestnut hair, disheveled and damp, had fallen about her face and neck. Her long lashes lay upon her cheeks. Her lips were slightly parted. One arm hung down from the edge of the couch, its hand relaxed and open, the fingers limp.

Long and earnestly Polaris looked at her. He could see only her profile. Her face was very white and still, outlined there against the furs. The light went out of his tawny eyes, and he set his teeth and turned his face to the wall. The sob that arose in his throat was wrung from the depths of a spirit sorely stricken. Now death were welcome indeed.

"Grieve not so," the stranger said hastily. "She is not dead, and I am a fool to bring such fright upon you. She did but swoon when you yourself were overlong in returning to the realm of the living. Here."

He passed an arm under the shoulders of Polaris, and assisted him to rise and cross to the other couch.

Swaying like a drunken man, the son of the snows bent and touched the wrist of the girl with his fingers. When he felt the tides of the life-blood leaping through the warm flesh, a joy welled up within him that was akin to pain in its throbbing. Come what might, his lady lived, and once again there was light in his world. He laid his cheek against hers and he was near to tears in his weakness.

Presently he raised his head, and for the first time gave a thought to his surroundings. The room he was in was shaped like the quarter of a circle. The couch on which he had lain was along the curved side of the room, and there the wall was of steel or iron, against which he could hear the lapping of waters. At each end, where the cabin narrowed to the points of its arc, were cabinets carved of polished woods. At the side where the girl lay the wall was of wood, also, and was pierced by a small door. A number of garments hung from pegs in the paneling. Near to the door, in a golden sheath, swung a heavy, short-bladed sword.

Overhead was a crisscross of slender wooden beams, and in the midst of them was set a translucent globe of porcelain or clouded glass, through which a strong light was shed, light that was almost as clear in its quality as that of day.

At the sight of those crossed beams, Polaris's memory stirred quickly. Where had he seen such before? Ah, he had it! It was just such a lattice-work that had made a raft for the stranger when he had found him floating in the sea. What was the meaning of it?

The screaming fury of the tempest, with its menace to all that he held dearest; the terrible moments when the *Minnetonka* went roaring down to ruin; the struggle in the sea; the agony of resuscitation; the grim fear that had choked him when he saw his dear lady lying there so pale and still—all those transitions had shaken even the strong will and cool brain of the son of the snows. He shook his head

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impatiently, as though the fog through which his mind groped were a physical fact, to be dismissed so.

Here at his side was the living answer to the questions that now trooped thick and fast—the man who had promised him life on the sinking deck of the cruiser and who had made that promise good.

"Where are we, and who and what are you?" Polaris asked him.

The answer was as ready as it was surprising.

"We are under the sea in the captain's cabin of a fademe in the navy of the great king, Bel-Ar. And I" —he bowed slightly and smiled—"I am the Captain Oleric the Red, also of the navy of the great king, but at present without a fademe to command."

SO UNUSUALLY circumstanced from his very birth had been the life of Polaris Janess that he long before had accepted and made his own the philosophy which the Prince of Denmark taught to Horatio. Things that the ordinary man would scoff at and reject as preposterous had been the incidents of his everyday existence. So now the extraordinary declaration of him who named himself Oleric the Red did not move him to any great show of surprise.

Instead, there came to him the sorrowful vision of the good gray cruiser, sundered and wrecked and going down to the ocean's bed, bearing with her many a man whom he had been glad to call his friend—men who twice had risked their lives in the antarctic perils that others might live. With that picture in his mind came a thought that drove all the mists from his brain and made it burn with a sense of outrage and anger.

He snapped himself erect, and with hands clenched and blazing eyes looked down on Oleric.

"The breaking of the good ship yonder came not from within, but from without," he said sternly. "That great ray of strange light that cut her like a knife was some devil's device of these that you call fademes. Is it not true?"

Over the face of Oleric passed a shadow that made it sad. But his eyes were steadfast and unflinching.

"It is true," he answered. "I would have prevented it if I could have. Your ship has gone the way of all others which have come to the coasts of Maeronica."

"Is it, then, the custom of your 'great king' so to greet strangers who come to his shores?" asked Polaris.

"Such have been the orders of the king of Maeronica," replied Oleric. "Many a long century has rolled into the past since any ship, save the fademes, cast anchor in the harbor of the city of Adlaz. It is the law. It is so writ upon the sacred column. But it is a bad law."

"An hour ago we had not guessed of the existence even of this land of Maeronica of yours, with its city of Adlaz and its rule of death in the sea," said Polaris. "All that we asked was to go our ways in peace and a safe journey to America. Now, because of the evil law of an evil land, a great ship's company is food for the fishes. You say well that it is a bad law.

"And, hark you, Oleric the Red, I count the reckoning between this King Bel-Ar of yours and me as both long and heavy. I do not know how it will fall about, or when; but my heart tells me that some time I shall make settlement of that score."

Rose Emer stirred and moaned, and Polaris turned to her. He knelt again at the side of her couch and chafed her hands.

Running his fingers through his red hair, Oleric looked down at Polaris. A strange light shone in the blue eyes of the captain, and over his face spread a crafty and satisfied smile. He nodded his head as though a thought had come to him that pleased him much.

"Yourself and the lady here are not the only ones saved from the ship," he said at length.

"What? There are others that live?" Polaris asked quickly. "Who, and where are they?"

"In the opposite cabin of the fademe is the old man Zenas," Oleric replied, "and with him is the large and fat young man who made all of the jokes at the table on the ship. And in another fademe is the captain—Everson—and the two you saved from Sardanes, the giant Minos and the dark and splendid lady, Memene."

"What know you of Sardanes?" Polaris asked. "And how comes it that you speak our English speech, now that your tongue is loosened?"

Oleric smiled. "Though my tongue was idle on your ship yonder, my ears were not," he said, "nor were my eyes, and they gathered me much information. I know that you, whom they call the son of the snows, have lived a strange life and looked upon many wonders. But they are as nothing to the wonders which you are to see presently—and I, Oleric the Red, shall show them to you." He laughed soundlessly.

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"But the language—where learned you the English tongue?" Polaris asked again. "Surely it is not spoken in this Maeronica, this land whereof no man has ever heard."

"Many years ago I learned it—from the lips of a slave. He, too, had been taken from the deck of a ship which was sunk by the fademes," was the answer of Oleric. He regarded Polaris keenly. Nor was that reply without its effect.

"Slaves!" Polaris cried. "Is this another of the laws of this land of yours—to make slaves of strangers?"

"It is the law of the great king," Oleric said. "Few such have been taken alive, but they have lived as slaves or died on the sands of the arena to make sport for the people at the great games which are a part of the Feast of Years."

FOR a moment, even Rose Emer was forgotten. Polaris looked up at the Maeronican captain with a blaze in his eyes that boded little of submission to the laws of Bel-Ar, the king.

When he spoke, it was very quietly. "Law or no law, backs shall break and spirits set out on their journeys before I shall become slave to any man."

"But the maid here," interposed Oleric—"would you bring doom upon her as well as upon yourself? Be not so rash, my brother. 'All things come to him that waits,' was a saying of that slave from whom I learned your tongue—O'Connell, he did call his name. I know not if his saying be true. I know he waited many long years, and death came to him."

Polaris shook his head slowly.

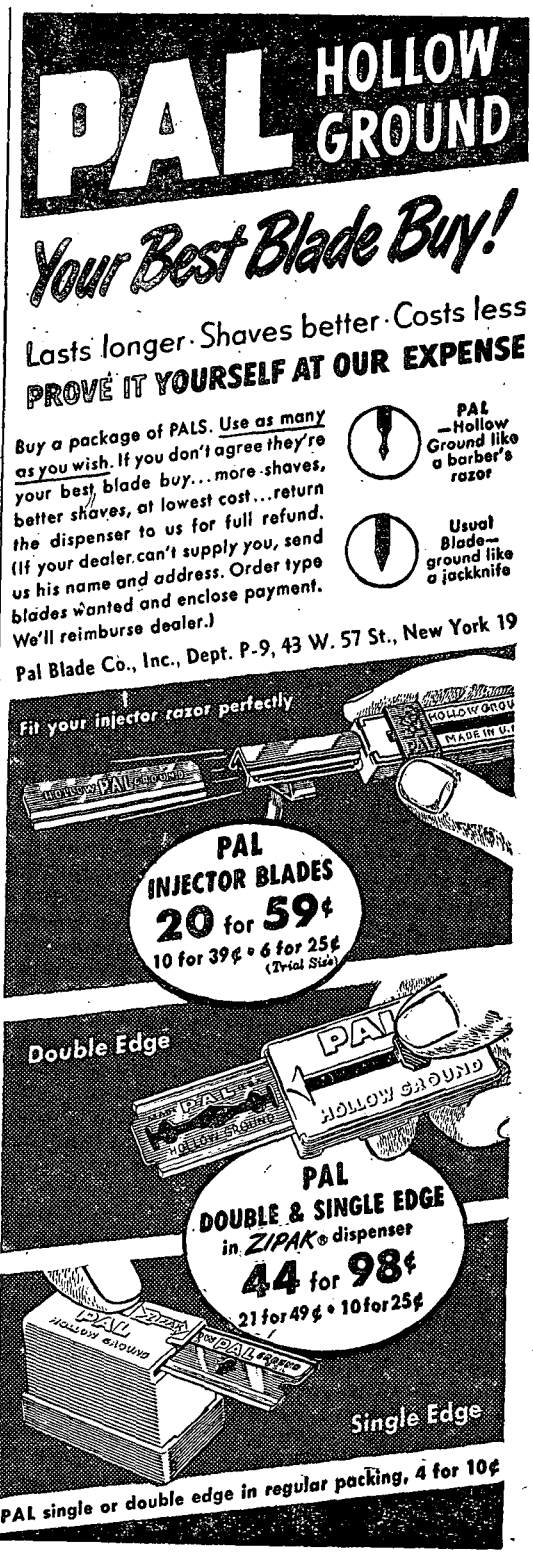
"There is little cheer in these words of yours, Oleric the Red," he said. "And I do not know why you should call me brother, for whom you foretell a life of slavery. But these things are bridges to be crossed when met." He turned back to Rose Emer. "Have you such a thing as wine on this ship?" he asked. "This swoon is long in passing."

Again the red captain regarded the broad back with satisfaction and smiled his craftful smile.

He stepped to the end of the cabin, and from the cabinet there fetched a tall glass flagon, bound with golden filagree-work, and a slender, twisted goblet. The liquor which he poured from the flagon was cherry-red, and sent forth a pleasing aroma.

"Here is of the best in Maeronica," he said. "Trust a captain of the fademes to know it."

Lifting Rose's head on his arm, Polaris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held the goblet to her lips and let the red wine trickle down. As he did so, the door of the cabin was opened from without. A man thrust his head through and shouted to Oleric in a strange though not unmusical tongue. The captain answered him a word or two, and the door was closed again. Polaris saw that the man wore armor of a pattern similar to that of Oleric, and that, like the captain's, his face was ruddy. But his hair was black, and he wore a short, curling beard. While the door was opened, the purr of smoothly running machinery could be heard, and with it a steady hissing, bubbling noise, like that of escaping steam.

Rose sat up suddenly and glanced around her with frightened eyes. She threw her arms around Polaris's neck and clung to him.

"You lay so still," she sobbed, "I thought that you were dead. But you are alive—alive!"

Oleric bent forward and spoke hurriedly.

"We are nearing the harbor of the city of Adlaz," he said. "I do not know when I shall have opportunity to talk with you again. But if it be not soon, wait; and accept with patience, even though it shall try you sorely, all that shall happen.

"Just now you asked me why I called you 'brother.' You saved me from the sea. On the ship yonder you and the old man Zenas, and another whom I grieve that I could not save, tended me when you thought that I was near to death. And after, when your sailors murmured, and they would have cast me into the sea, you guarded me from harm. All those things I know and shall not forget. That is why I call you brother. And back of all of those things there is still another reason, of which I hope to tell you soon. I learned from the slave O'Connell that the shake of the hands between men is a bond of friendship. Will you shake my hand, my brother?"

Polaris took the proffered hand in a grip that made its owner wince. "It seems that despite the laws of Bel-Ar, the king, I have found a friend," he said. "I shall try to be patient, Oleric."

"Hold your hand from anger," enjoined the red captain earnestly, "even though you be put to serve as a slave in the mines of Bel-Ar. And instruct your companions that they do likewise. Great days are coming upon Maeronica, and I promise you faithfully that you shall play a great part in them—"

He broke his speech suddenly.

Again the door swung open. Somewhere in the depths of the fademe a bell rang clearly. The noise of the mechanism ceased. The black-bearded man who had thrust his head into the cabin before, stood in the doorway and beckoned to Oleric.

"Remember," warned the captain as he passed Polaris. "Patience and that strong heart of yours shall carry you far before your sun goes down."

He went out and the door closed after him.

"What does he mean, with his talk of slaves and the mines and all those strange names?" Rose Emer asked wonderingly. "Where are we?"

Polaris told her all that he had learned from the captain. She heard him with wide eyes.

"*You*—a slave!" she cried. "Ah, no, not that? Is it to be like this all our lives—to see happiness just ahead of us, but never reach it? Fate cannot be so cruel. Think what you have endured. And now to be a slave here in this terrible foreign land!"

Perhaps Fate was listening then—Fate, who can be both cruel and kind, sordid and splendid, according to her whim. She had played many strange tricks on this man. But she now decreed that he should never serve the king Bel-Ar as a slave.

SOON after the departure of Oleric, the door of the cabin was opened again, and an armored man entered. It was he of the black beard, whom Polaris rightly guessed to be the captain of the fademe. With him came three other men, unarmored, who evidently were members of the crew of the craft.

Sturdy, black-haired fellows these were, dressed alike in loose, neckless blue tunics of some woven material, with elbow-sleeves, and belted in at the waist. Beneath the tunics they wore long, close-fitting nether garments like the hose of the Middle Ages, only these were both hose and trousers, too. On their feet were shoes of soft leather, the tops of which came nearly to their knees, and which were laced with gay-colored cords. Their heads were covered with flat caps of cloth which resembled somewhat the tam-o'-shanters of the Scots. Those, too, were dyed in bright colors.

With a motion of his arm the captain indicated to Rose and Polaris that they were to leave the cabin. The girl still was weak from her swoon, and tottered when she stood, and her garments were wet and

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bedraggled. Polaris wrapped her in the robe of furs with which Oleric had covered her, and lifted her in his arms. As he did so, one of the sailors spoke harshly and snatched at the robe. He was clumsy, and his fingers caught in Rose's unbound hair and pulled it so that she winced.

Polaris set the girl down and in the same motion spun on his heel and struck the man under the ear.

Well it was for the Maeronican sailor that the son of the snows, quick as was his anger at the affront to the girl, remembered the counsel of Oleric. Even as he struck, he remembered, and he opened his hand; else the stroke, directed by his mighty thews, had ended all things for the sailor. As it was, the blow partly lifted the man from his feet and shot him sprawling through the open door to fall heavily outside.

From its peg on the wall the captain caught down the short-bladed sword and tore it from the sheath. At a word from him, his two remaining men plucked knives from their belts and closed in.

Prospects of battle cleared the last of the numbness from the limbs of Polaris. He thrust Rose Emer behind him. He ran his eyes hastily over the cabin in search of a weapon, but saw none which would serve him. In another instant he would have sprung barehanded against the Maeronican steel.

At that juncture a voice cried out, and Oleric the Red stepped over the fallen sailor and entered the cabin. Whatever may have been the failings of the red captain, slowness in action was not one of them. Gripping the two crouching sailors, each by the belt from behind, he tugged so mightily that their feet flew from under them, and they sat hard on the cabin floor. With a catlike leap, Oleric reached the side of the captain of the fademe and struck the sword from his hand. As the blade clanged on the floor, Oleric set his foot across it. Then, and not until then, did he seek to learn the trouble's cause.

"What now, comrade," he said to Polaris. "Do you then court death so soon?"

But when he heard of the sailor's action, he nodded his red head.

"So would I have done," he said shortly. He turned on the other captain and spoke to him sternly in the Maeronican tongue. Almost choking in his rage, the commander answered him in sneering tones, and with a shrug of his shoulders stalked from the cabin. The sailors slunk after him.

Oleric watched their departing backs with a hard and level stare. "Daelo grows insolent," he said. "He thinks, because I have had the misfortune to lose a fademe, that I shall get no pretty welcome from Bel-Ar. Maybe he is right. Bel-Ar loves not to lose his ships. Ah, well—" He, too, shrugged his shoulders, and then he smiled.

"And you, my brother—" He shook his finger at Polaris. "Unless you learn to curb that fine spirit of yours, I need to be no prophet to foretell what shall befall you. But come; let us leave this place. The air of it grows foul."

With Rose in his arms, Polaris stepped from the cabin and gazed curiously about him.

He stood in a long gallery or corridor, some nine feet wide by thirty in extent. It was lighted brightly by a number of globes similar to that in the cabin. The flooring was of wood, the ceiling of steel. Opposite him was the door of another cabin. A few feet along the corridor ahead of him, toward the prow of the fademe, the floor was pierced to admit a large post or beam, which thrust up through it and disappeared through another opening in the ceiling of the gallery. Around the beam spiraled a slender winding stair of yellow metal.

Oleric led on toward the bow. As he passed the stairway, Janess saw that it led to a small, towerlike structure above. A glance through the opening in the floor showed him another gallery, or deck, below, and he had a glimpse of a mass of mechanism and shafting. It was the engine room of the fademe into which he looked. Near the prow, the flooring was cut away again to allow the passage of what seemed to be a pillar of solid, yellow glass, as large around as the body of a man.

As they passed the second pillar by, Oleric struck it lightly with his palm.

"There is what brought death to your good ship, my brother," he said. "It is the secret of the power of the navy of Bel-Ar."

AT THE end of the corridor was an open door. Beyond it was a small chamber and another door. The chamber was constructed entirely of steel. Both of its doors were circular in shape, and they were fitted with valves and bars which made them resemble the breechblocks of enormous cannon. From beyond the second door came the sound of the splashing of waves and the hum of many human voices.

Oleric passed through the chamber. At

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the outer door he paused and gave Polaris a hand with his burden. A breeze of salt air fanned their faces. Through the door Polaris saw an expanse of blue water alight with shafts of sunshine—for the rain had ceased—and the line of a rocky wall.

"The harbor of the city of Adlaz," the red captain said.

They stood on a metal deck six feet square on the extreme prow of the fademe. From the deck a narrow, swaying gangplank reached to the edge of the quay that was built of massive blocks of masonry, alongside of which the fademe was moored.

At their right was the tossing blue and white of a harbor large enough to have given shelter to the ships of all the navies of the world, could they have come to it. Nearly three miles in width and length it lay, the whole girt round by the ring of a lofty mountain wall, in which on the seaward side there was not a notch or a break. Two hundred feet up from the water's edge the sheer cliffs towered, their faces smooth and precipitous.

It was more a lake than a harbor that held the navy of Bel-Ar. Later the Americans learned that its only entrance from the sea was a natural tunnel many feet below the level of the water, through which the fademes passed out and in. The harbor was the giant cup or crater of a volcano, ages quenched.

Along the wharves of stone and anchored in the lake rocked the fademes of the Maeronican fleet, each one resembling nothing so much as a monstrous goldfish carrying a glass tower on its back. Gold they were, indeed—and they shimmered and glittered in the sunlight as only gold can glitter.

Like immense, flattened globes the fademes were fashioned—globes forty feet through their lengthened axes, and drawn to points at their stems and sterns. Where the dorsal fin of a fish projects from its spine, each fademe bore a small, round deckhouse with ribs of metal and sides of polished crystal.

Yes; the harbor of Adlaz was very like a vast bowl with many goldfish (the fleet of fademes must have numbered one hundred and fifty). But they were far from being the harmless toys of children, these golden ships of the underseas. Deadly enspine, each fademe bore a small, round be sent forth on cruel errands.

On the dancing surface of the lake and in and out among the gleaming fademes plied a number of small open boats, driven by oarsmen, and here and there in the anchorage were scattered undersea craft of a make smaller by half and more slender than the fademes. These were called marizels.

Back of the quays and the wharves was a line of low buildings of black and red stone, well constructed, with doors of wood and glass windows. Except that their architecture was quaint and ran much to carved faces of men and beasts, interspersed with squat domes and spires, they might have been the warehouses of some well-to-do port of the old world.

An open space, a number of acres in extent, lay beyond the buildings and reached to the frowning face of the cliff-wall. The wall itself was pierced by a broad arch or tunnel wide enough for a squadron of cavalry to have ridden through it abreast and so high that a galleon's masts would not have touched its vaulted roof.

Above the center of the arch, and carved in the rock of the cliffside, was a great round face, many feet across. It was a piece of sculpture to crook the fingers of a miser; for it was covered with beaten gold, so that it resembled a rising sun. That semblance was heightened further by long shafts or rays which extended from the face across the surface of the rock in all directions. They, too, were of gold. Work of a master-sculptor, it was, who had guided his chisel in bold, strong strokes. The features were noble, but the smiling lips were cruel, and there was cruelty in the golden eyes which looked down on the golden ships in the harbor.

All these things Polaris saw from the forward deck of the fademe, and more. The quays and the court were black with people. At one side of the archway was drawn up a line of horsemen clad in steel armor. In the midst of the throng in the court a man in a yellow tunic and cap was cleaving his way through the press toward the wharf on a big black horse.

As he crossed the swaying plank to the wharf with Rose Emer in his arms, Polaris heard a great cry of wonder go up from the crowd. In a moment he learned that it was not the appearance of the strangers that had caused the outcry. It was the return of Oleric the Red, who had long been given up as lost. Evidently the red captain was a popular man in his land. People crowded around him and clapped him on the back and gave him words of welcome home. Greetings none the less hearty for that they were tinged with a

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note of apprehension for his future welfare, which even Polaris could sense, though he understood no word of it all.

Down from his horse sprang the man in the yellow tunic and enfolded Oleric in a mighty embrace. "Ah, old red bear, it is good for the eyes to see you once again. We had thought the fishes had you. But"—and he lowered his voice—"you will have to think of a pretty tale to tell to Bel-Ar. He raves at the loss of a fademe."

"That he does," answered Oleric, "but I am good at the telling of tales, as you know. Besides, I have with me a matter of a small sack, which was not lost with the fademe, and which shall make the eyes of his queen to glisten. So mayhap I shall find forgiveness."

The other ran his eye over Polaris and Rose. "What, more slaves?" he asked. "Orlas already has brought in three, and one of them a giant."

"Yes, Brunar, more slaves." Oleric's face grew sober. "Poor souls. My heart is heavy for them, for they did save my life out yonder on the sea, and treat me kindly."

"Here, old bear, take you my horse and ride on to Adlaz," said Brunar. "I have business here. I will come on anon through the canal in a marizel. And, if the hand of Bel-Ar lie not too heavy upon you, there will be a rare night to-night, a rare night; eh, old bear?" Laughing, he tossed the reins to Oleric and disappeared in the crowd.

From the stern of the fademe they had quitted sounded a high-pitched voice in notes of vituperation. Oleric looked back. The captain Daelo stood on the rear deck of his vessel. When he saw Oleric turn, he shook his clenched fist at the red captain. With a laugh, Oleric flung back a remark of such import that it made Daelo dance upon his deck with rage.

"Now there's a fool," grumbled Oleric, "who may be troublesome. I have the best of him this time, though. Back to sea patrol he goes. And there is a maid in Adlaz town—a sweet and comely maid, for love of whom he's well nigh witless. I just did tell him that I'd comfort her in his absence." The captain tossed his head and laughed his soundless laugh.

Bidding a lad hold his horse, Oleric led Polaris and Rose into one of the buildings near the end of the wharf. There, under a guard of sailors, they found old Zenas, the two Sardanians, Everson, and Brooks. Lacking an interpreter, such as Oleric, these others were in sore bewilderment. The stunning blow of the loss of the *Minnetonka* had cast them in a depth of gloom, which the appearance of Polaris and Rose Emer and the few explanations they were able to give did little to lighten. Everson, especially, was like a man distraught. Even the scientific zeal of Zenas Wright for once was quenched, and he met the marvels about him with a listless eye.

UNDER orders from Oleric, men fetched from stables near the quays a long, low car, to which two span of horses were attached, and the Americans were bidden to take their places in it. Wild and reckless drivers these Maeronicans were. Two of them climbed into the car, turned their horses' heads toward the great archway and whipped them into a gallop. With a yell, the crowd parted. The hoofs of the horses rang on the stones of the paved courtyard. As they passed from the court into the tunnel, the line of steel horsemen came clattering after them. Oleric rode at the side of the car.

At intervals in the walls of the tunnel were set translucent globes like those on the fademe, which shed a strong white light along the way. The flooring was paved and smooth. For perhaps five minutes the

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cavalcade thundered through the passage in the rock, and then it emerged again into the light of day.

Ahead stretched a long, wide roadway, paved from side to side with blocks of black stone, fast embedded in a cement of the same hue. At both sides of the road were low walls, and beyond the walls were handsome mansions and grounds, where fair trees tossed their greenery and bright flowers bloomed amid a wealth of shrubbery. From the splendid and fragrant lawns men and women looked forth as the car whirled past, and children left their play to run to the walls and stare wide-eyed at the strangers.

Most of the men were garbed as had been those of the fademe's crew and also the crowd at the harbor, in loose, belted tunics and hose, but finer in texture and more showy in coloring than those of the commoner sort.

Some of the old men wore flowing gowns. The women and children were clad in short kirtles. Everywhere was a riot of color. The garments of the people were gay with many tints and hues. The grounds were flecked with flowers. The dwellings, all of which were built of stone, made their brave show of colors, too. The quarries from which the masonry was cut yielded white and black and red stone, and in their construction work the builders had varied them pleasingly.

From the tunnel's mouth at the base of the ancient hill, the long, black road sloped up gradually. Far ahead loomed the walls and domes of a great city. Oleric rose in his stirrups and pointed to where they were outlined against the sky.

"Yonder lies Adlaz, chief city of the Children of Ad," he cried.

Midway in their course to the city, the shouting drivers pulled their horses suddenly to one side of the road, and the riders of the escort scattered to right and left to leave a clear passage. From far up the wonderful street sounded the clash and clatter of pounding hoofs in desperate haste.

But no horse it was that galloped so madly from Adlaz town to the sea, but a giant, bronze-coated bull. On he came, head down and tail aloft, his hoofs striking fire from the smooth, hard rock of the roadway. At intervals he gave voice to a deep-throated bellow.

He was still three hundred yards from the car when Rose Emer screamed out in horror. "Ah, the child! Save the child!" she cried.

From one of the mansions farther up the street, a child had strayed, a baby girl, a fragile, black-haired little thing, not more than five years old. Shrieking with laughter, she had eluded her mother and run out through the gateway to the center of the road. Halfway across the pavement, she slipped and fell. Down the street on thundering hoofs came the great bronze death.

Upsetting one of the drivers in his haste, Polaris leaped down over the wheel of the car. Scarcely had his feet touched the roadway, when Minos, the Sardanian, was down behind him. Snatching a short spear from the hand of one of the steel riders, the son of the snows bounded up the street to meet the bull, going at a speed which few living things could have equaled. Over his shoulder he called to Minos:

"Care for the child, Minos; leave the beast to me."

Just beyond where the baby girl lay, he met the furious mass of charging flesh. The little red eyes of the oncoming monster saw the man in its path, and for an instant the bull seemed to halt in its stride, and its hoofs slid on the smooth pavement. Then it lowered its head still farther and charged on with a roar.

From the tail of his eye, Janess saw the Sardanian snatch the baby from the perilous path and leap to one side. Behind them the red captain, shouting and cursing, alone of all the troop of riders strove to urge his affrighted horse forward.

"Hold! Hold!" he shouted in English. "Let the beast go!"

EVEN had he heard, Polaris would have been little minded to let the bull go free. It was plain that the animal was mad. A bloody froth dripped from its jaws as it ran. Behind the son of the snows, right where the bull was headed, were his friends, and among them one who meant more to him than all of the rest of the world.

Directly in the path of the lowered horns, that were coming on with the power of a mighty battering-ram, Polaris stood. Then he sprang sidewise, turning as he leaped. So narrowly did he time the onset that the shoulder of the bull grazed his knee. As the huge body passed him, the man drove the short spear home behind its shoulder, guiding the steel with the strength of arm and the keenness of eye that had helped him to survive through the long years when combat with the beasts of the wild was a part almost of his daily existence.

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The stroke was true. So deeply did the steel spear bite, that its shaft was wrenched from the hands of Polaris, and he was pitched on his side on the pavement.

Unhurt, the man was up in an instant, but his work was done. That bull would charge no more. He lay dead at the side of the roadway, his tongue thrust out, his eyes glazing, and his life-blood making a pool on the stones. The Maeronican spear was set fast in his heart.

Hardly was Polaris on his feet again when the armored horsemen rode down on him with lifted spears, cursing him in their own tongue. Oleric had conquered his horse, and he now interposed to prevent another struggle which would have been all too one-sided. For, weaponless as they were, the three other American men clambered down and ran to the aid of Polaris.

Minos, who had returned the child to her mother, who knelt half fainting in her gateway, was the first to reach his side. Though he bore no weapon, the giant Sardanian squared his mighty figure and made ready to withstand the onset of horse and steel.

Polaris leaped to the side of the fallen bull and tore the spear from its body. Then he turned on the horsemen. He could not guess the cause of their sudden anger, but he, too, was ready.

Before blows could be struck, Oleric thrust his horse into the open space between the friends and the Maeronican riders. By dint of persuasion, interlarded with not a few threats, he induced his followers to forego their hostile intentions.

"You fools!" he shouted. "Would you cheat Bel-Ar of the terrible vengeance he is sure to take, and have a part of it fall back on you for balking him?"

When he had quieted his men, the captain turned gloomily to Polaris.

"My brother, your doom is sealed, indeed," he said. "This is one of the sacred bulls from the temple of Shamar, the great sun, that you have slain. When one of these goes mad, as did this one, no man in the land does aught to stay it. That is the law. From its horns to its hoofs, every hair of it is sacred. Bel-Ar may forgive me the loss of a fademe, though it will be a great vexation to him; but the death of one of these sacred bulls of Shamar he will not forgive any man. Sooner might you expect mercy if you declared yourself a follower of the Goddess Glorian of Ruthar. In this matter I cannot hope to persuade him. By the bones of the ten thousand kings, I am sorry that this thing has happened!"

But later, as they rode on toward the city of Adlaz, the red captain seemed to be far from rueful. He rode behind the car, and, when he thought none was observing him, he smiled to himself, as though the course events were taking pleased him very well indeed.

CHAPTER III

THE KING JUDGES

LIKE the shape of a mighty wheel with four spokes was the plan of the city of Adlaz—or more like a circle drawn around the angles of a cross, the curved line of the outer boundary passing through the far-flung arms. Built in a long-ago time of perils and wars, Adlaz was a walled city, and its wall was both stout and high, and set with many castellated towers. It was also a very ancient wall, to which its moss-grown, weather-worn gray stones bore witness.

In all of the sweeping circumference of the outer wall, which enclosed some ten square miles of street and square, there were four breaks only, and those were protected by ponderous gates of bronze and guarded well by soldiers of the king. Those breaks were where the rim of the wheel met its four spokes. The wall was the rim. The spokes were four wide roadways, which ran east, west, north and south from the city's center. The hub of the wheel was a park or esplanade, fronted on all sides by magnificent buildings in which the colored rocks hewn from the Maeronican quarries were blended splendidly. In the very center towered the massive structure of the Temple of the Sun, built all of white marble, the tips of its hundred spires capped with solid gold.

Other and many streets were laid out in all directions within the angles of the four great avenues; but none was so wide as they by many feet. Within the wall dwelt nearly half a million souls, Maeronicans, if one named them from their country, but loving to call themselves the Children of Ad, after their city, which in turn drew its name from a certain mighty king, the time of whose rule was so lost in the mists of dim antiquity that he was little more than a tradition in the mouths of the people.

Across from the Temple of the Sun, and in the northeast angle of the arms of the cross, stood the palace of the kings of Maeronica, another immense pile of masonry, built also of a solid color, not dazzling white as was the marble of the house of

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the god, but the deep, rich red of granite porphyry. Back of the palace lay the barracks of the king's guard of half a thousand picked men, his stables, and the quarters of countless servants. In the southwest angle was the Place of Games—a hippodrome and circus, with an amphitheater of black basalt of an age and splendor that would not have shamed the proudest days of seven-hilled Rome itself, although its foundation stones were laid long before Remus leaped over his brother's wall.

Around the hub and extending to the wall were the homes of the Children of Ad—nobles, captains, rich idlers, merchants, money-lenders, and the common people. In latter years, since Adlaz, strong and triumphant, defied her enemies, it had been the pleasure of many of her wealthier sons to build their mansions beyond the sheltering wall of the city, and along the four splendid roadways stretched many a fair and wide estate. Such were those the prisoners from the fademes saw as their car was driven up the long, black road from the harbor in the mountain.

It was late afternoon, and the sun was casting his last slant rays over the distant mountain rim, when the car was halted at the bronze gates of the western entrance to Adlaz. The red captain trotted his horse forward to parley with the captain of the gate-guard and explain why he led Brunar's horsemen, and who were these whom he brought with him to the city. That parleying was added to by one of the riders in steel. Whatever he told the gate-captain, it did not add to that worthy's esteem for the captives, for he favored them with an exceedingly evil look as they rode through his gates.

"Ugh-h," remarked Ensign Brooks, "I can't say that I care for that party. He has a lean and hungry look. Speaking of hunger, I wonder how soon we will get where we are going to, and whether it will be supper time when we get there. I could eat cat right now, I'm so near to starvation."

Oleric heard him and replied with a smile. "You shall eat soon, and of good fare. So much at the least I can promise."

To which the ensign replied with a stare. For the young naval man did not like the red captain and his ways, whom he blamed partly for the loss of the *Minnetonka* and all of the rest of the troubes, of which this land seemed to hold a plenty.

Soon after the car entered the gates, the sunlight faded into dusk, and then white-capped messengers passed through the streets, plucking the cloth hoods from globes which were fixed on posts of stone at intervals along all of the ways. From each globe, as its hood was removed, sprang a broad circle of white light. On the tall buildings and their many spires and on the towers of the city wall similar lights flared up.

EXCEPT for the quaint architecture of the place, and the strange garb of the folk who thronged its streets, the Americans might have imagined themselves entering some stately capital of the modern world, and not Adlaz of Maeronica, the oldest of all peopled cities of the earth—older, indeed, than many among the buried ruins in which archeologists love to delve.

For its pavements were curbed and guttered, and between them and the building fronts and lawns were walks of stone, bordered by well-ordered rows of trees and many shrubs and beds of flowers. The people who walked the streets, too, were quiet and orderly folk. They stared hard at those who rode in the car, but there was no unseemly outcry. Only an occasional shout of surprise and welcome went up as some group of strollers recognized the merry face and flaming poll of Oleric the Red.

At all of these marvels the two Sardanians gazed wonderingly and talked together of them in their tongue.

"Ah, surely here is one of the greatest cities of the world of men, my prince," said the Lady Memene. "Note the mighty towers yonder and how they flash and gleam. And the folk! In one short ride we have seen enough of them to people two lands like our own lost Sardanes."

"Aye, Memene, these be wonders, indeed," Minos answered. "And here is a kingdom and a city well worth the ruling over. Yet these, even these, must be as nothing to the things beyond in the greater world, whereof Polaris hath told us. I wonder if we shall ever reach them. For myself, though, I find this land and its folk more to my manner of understanding than the world-dwellers way to the north. Here, methinks, one might, did opportunity offer, carve out a kingdom for the king that is to come."

Memene flushed and hung her head, and the two of them lapsed into thoughtful silence.

Truly, Minos of Sardanes lacked not in ambition.

"Too late, now, to hope to meet Bel-Ar the king before the morrow," Oleric said.

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"And perhaps that is as well. By another coming of Shamar his wrath may have cooled somewhat, though 'twill still burn hot enough, I'll wager."

The charioteers drove their car to the front of a long, low building, the façade of which verged almost upon the pavement of the black avenue which was known as Chedar's Flight, because of an ancient battle which had been fought along its course. There, the riders of Brunar left the car and clattered away up the street to their own place. A group of street idlers surrounded the car and began to discuss its passengers, taking note especially of the giant form of Minos and the beauty of the two ladies.

"This was a palace, once, but it serves as a prison, now," Oleric said to Polaris, as gates of bronze were thrust back and the charioteers drove through and into a roomy court, partly paved and partly lawn and trees. "Sorry I am, comrade, that this must be, but 'tis not of my working."

"I blame you not, friend," said Polaris. "But other days bring other fortunes. I do not think that I shall stay long in your prison. And it comes to me also that your king best had let this party depart his land in peace, else the next turn of the wheel may bring to him that which he least desires. And I think that you may have a hand in that turn, Oleric."

"Are you a prophet, my brother?" exclaimed Oleric, searching the face of Polaris for a hidden meaning. "For if you be not one, then you have a rare spirit."

"No prophet I," Polaris answered. He sprang down over the wheel and stretched his weary limbs. "Only at times, when all seems black, my heart does whisper courage, and then all things turn well. It did so just now, when I saw the lights spring up along that splendid street out there." He held up his arms and assisted Rose Emer to alight from the car.

Oleric gazed at him curiously. "So you think that the wheel will turn, and that I will have a hand in it, my brother, do you?" he whispered to himself. "Perchance I shall."

He swung down from his horse and cast the reins to an attendant.

"What! Mordo! Where do you tarry? Here be guests for you," he shouted.

They stood in the dusk under the spreading boughs of an ancient oak and waited while a tall, loosely built man, black-bearded, and clad in the armor of gold that was the badge of power in Maeronica, came down from a pillared porch on the other side of the court and shambled across. They noticed that his step was somewhat uncertain, and once or twice he stumbled as he approached.

"Mordo, captain, and keeper of the king's prison house," Oleric muttered to Polaris. "He's a good fellow, but does love his wine cup exceeding well."

As the prison keeper came across the stones and the grass, he shouted, and an underling ran to him, swinging a lighted globe encaged in a metal net. Mordo took the lamp and cast its rays on the party. His face was flushed, and his eyes rolled until they saw Oleric. Then his mouth gaped in a delighted grin.

"Hoy! Hoy!" he exclaimed. "By the wall and the beasts and the shadows of the fathers of Ad, if it is not my old bottle-crony come sailing home again! I thought my ears had lied when I heard that voice in the dark." He set the lamp down and pitched forward, steadying himself with his hands on Oleric's shoulders. "And the same old dekkar, eh?" (A dekkar was a broad goldpiece of the coin of Maeronica.) "They said that you were gone across the black river, but I believed them not. 'Not Oleric,' I told them. 'Not so long as there is left unemptied a single one of those long-stemmed bottles in old Mordo's cellar.' And I was right, eh, old firetop? Ah! Many a glass shall clink to-night, and many a rack be made lighter when Brunar and the others come."

Mordo threw his head back and laughed, a roaring gale of mirth.

"Why, I was so lonely to-night that already I have cracked two flagons, just for the good wine's company."

"So it seems," put in Oleric, sniffing. "Are you sure there were only two of those flagons?"

"Mayhap it was three; I care not; there's still space for more, as you well know," Mordo replied, still shaking with laughter. He took up his lantern again.

"But whom do you bring with you to Mordo's house?" he asked, peering once more at the strangers. "Women, too! And pretty ones!"

"Have an end to your banter, Mordo," Oleric interposed. "These be six guests for whom Bel-Ar will ask accounting. Hold them well. And harken, old friend; treat them kindly and to the best you have, for they did befriend me when I was in evil straits and sore in need of friends. That tale you shall hear later. Now hasten and bestow them. They are weary. And bethink you, man, your wine grows stale

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with waiting to be drunk, and my throat aches for the smack of it."

THROUGH his porch and into the depths of the building beyond, Mordo led the party. Along many halls and passages he led, and through gates and doors of bronze and steel, whereof an attendant bore the keys.

An ill place, this, to come out of, thought Polaris, noting the strength and number of the gates. Nor did the son of the snows relish at all the grim clanking of chains which issued from certain of the chambers which they passed along their route.

At length the jailer paused, in a hall so wide that its boundary walls could be seen only dimly by the light of the few globes which hung from its pillars of black stone, and so lofty that the pillars' tops were lost in the upper dusk. The hall was circular, and all around its walls were the doors to lesser chambers.

"Here may your stranger friends from the sea await the pleasure of Bel-Ar in peace," hiccoughed Mordo. "And 'tis better by far for them than some of the places that I have below, as you know, Oleric. Kings have sat in judgment here, and the beds in yonder chambers—queens have slept on them. May your guests sleep well, old fox; I can offer them no better, no better lodging place than the audience hall of the great King Bel-Tisam. I'll send them meat and wine. Now haste we to those bottles. Shamar send that Brunar be not long delayed."

"Here I must leave you for a space, my friends," Oleric said. "I would have you believe that I am not ungrateful for many good deeds remembered, and I hope yet to find the means to repay them. To-morrow I will go with you before Bel-Ar the king."

He bowed and went out with Mordo.

Presently came men with an abundance of fresh-cooked meats and trenchers and tall bottles of Maeronican wine.

Little heart for conversation was there among the seven friends. Each was busy with bitter thoughts. They ate, sitting on cushions about a low table which the attendants spread for them at the foot of one of the pillars. The two women, weary from the events of the day, soon went to their rest. Old Zenas Wright was not long in following their example.

"I'm growing old, boys," he said as he left the table. "And this has been a hard day—a terribly hard day. We appear to have strayed far into the yesterdays. To-morrow we will talk, and it will be strange if we cannot between us figure our way out. I don't want to leave my old bones in this place. I intend that they shall be buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Buffalo, near where I was born; ah me, where I was born. I vow and vum, I've seen some mighty queer sights since I walked up Main Street last."

The geologist turned and trudged sturdily away to the chamber which he had selected for his own.

Soon only Polaris and Lieutenant Everson were left in the great hall, Janess lying stretched on the floor, his head pillowed on his hand, and the lieutenant standing gloomily with folded arms, his back resting against one of the pillars. For many minutes those two talked of the things which had befallen; but neither one had a plan to offer.

"We must trust to the wit of this Oleric, of which I think he has plenty," said Polaris at length. "I believe that he wished us no ill, and I believe, too, that he forms some scheme for our advantage, though what it is I cannot guess."

"I don't like him," Everson said bluntly. "He is one of this nation of devils whose submarine sank my ship. Oh, for a few files of marines and a couple of twelve-inch guns!"

When Everson had gone, Polaris still lay at the foot of the pillar, thinking and planning, for he was a man in whom hope never died. He dozed at length, but suddenly he was wide awake. And, though he did not at once open his eyes, his wilderness-trained faculties, keen as those of any animal, were alert and watchful.

Something had come into the hall.

Nothing in living shape ever had struck fear into the heart of Polaris, and he had a healthy disbelief in the supernatural. He was not afraid now. But he felt that the presence that had entered the hall was both baleful and menacing. He felt the fixed regard of hidden eyes, and it sent an uneasy thrill through the roots of his hair at the back of his head. Whatever it was that had wakened him, it was not in the direction of the chambers where the others of his party lay, but far across the hall.

Cautiously he opened his eyes.

AT FIRST he could make out nothing. Then something stirred soundlessly from behind a far pillar near the wall. Polaris stared hard, and his eyes were almost more than mortal keen. For a fleeting instant he saw it clearly—the shape of a tall old man with snowy beard and

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hair, and with piercing eyes, full of evil. The man was dressed in flowing robes of white, on the breast of which glittered some object of burnished metal.

For an instant only the vision persisted on Polaris's retina. Then it was gone, and with no sound that even his sharp ears could catch.

Polaris snapped himself to his feet and bounded across the hall on the balls of his feet, almost as noiselessly as the shadow which had departed. And it had departed. Along the wall and behind the pillars Polaris glanced quickly. There was nothing there. Back of the pillar where he had seen the white shape was the closed door of a chamber. He tried the door and found it fast. He listened.

From the darkness beyond the closed door, he thought he heard the ghost of a thin chuckle. Immediately his attention was drawn to another quarter. Close behind him arose a deep growl, which had nothing ghostly in its quality, but was most material. Polaris spun upon his heels.

Some ten feet from him, and beside one of the pillars, from the foot of which it evidenty had arisen, stood a huge dog. It was the first animal of its kind which the son of the snows had seen in Maeronica, and the largest he ever had set eyes on in his life; larger by far even than gray old Marcus, his friend and comrade that he'd left behind in Boston town.

This brute was neither Great Dane nor mastiff, though in points it resembled both of those breeds. Its jaws were square, and its head and neck were massive. The tips of its powerful shoulders were a long yard up from the stone floor where it stood.

It was smooth of coat and of a glossy, blue-black color, except on its breast, where was a triangular patch of tawny yellow. Its ears had been clipped and stood erect and pointed. As it regarded the man, its big eyes glittered in the dim light. Its lips were writhed back from formidable teeth.

Another low growl rumbled from its deep chest.

Instinctively, dogs trusted Polaris. He had had much experience with their kind, and never had he seen one that in the end he could not make his friend. Unhesitatingly he extended his hand and crossed the floor to where the big beast stood. He guessed that it must have come in with the old man whom he had glimpsed, and had been left behind when the silent visitor had made his hurried departure. As he drew nearer, Polaris saw that the animal wore a broad leather collar, bossed with gold.

Unhurriedly, the son of the snows approached the brute until there was not the space of a yard between them. There he paused. The dog neither shrank nor cowered, but waited with muscles tensed and teeth exposed. Polaris was very watchful.

"Good fellow," he said.

At the sound of the man's voice, the dog shifted his position slightly. His head swayed. From Polaris's face he glanced to the outstretched hand. The bristling hackles at his neck subsided. He took a stiff step forward, then another. The tip of his cold muzzle touched the man's fingers. He sniffed. A long, red tongue crept forth and licked Polaris's hand. Another step, and the brute rubbed his great head against the man's thigh.

"Ah; I thought you would," said Polaris. "Come on." He turned and crossed the hall to his sleeping chamber. The dog padded beside him on silent feet. The last thing the son of the snows heard, after he had called Brooks to take the watch, and closed his eyes to slumber, was the sigh of the huge beast as it stretched itself before his open door.

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WORN of body and of nerves, Polaris slumbered deeply. Shamar rose high in the east and lighted the golden spires of his mighty temple in Adlaz town; still the man slept on, and as he slept, he dreamed. Far into the white, mysterious southland his fancies led, to a waste of ice and snow and bitter winds. He drove a team of splendid dogs—his gray brothers they seemed to be in the dream, those tried friends who had given their lives for their master, and of whom Marcus, if he still lived, was the last.

On the sledge which the dogs drew, rode Rose Emer, wrapped in furs, as in truth she once had ridden. There, too—and even in the dream he seemed strangely out of place—was the Maeronican captain. Yes, Oleric the Red trudged through the snows beside the sledge, clad in his golden armor, his teeth chattering in the chill blasts of the wilderness, and bearing in his hand a naked sword.

Danger, unseen, unknown, but frightful, encompassed the wanderers in the snow path. The dogs snarled and tore at their harness. Oleric ran forward, waving his sword, which seemed to drip blood on the white snows, and shouting.

"Up, brother, and call off this beast of yours!" the red captain cried. "For soon must we go before Bel-Ar."

With those words ringing in his ears, Polaris awoke. He sprang from his couch to the middle of the chamber. No dream's part was the shouting of Oleric. He stood in the hall before the chamber door, his lips still parted and a smile on his ruddy face.

And the snarling of a dog—that, too, was real.

Planted squarely in the doorway, hackles bristling, ears erect and fangs bared, was the immense animal with which Polaris had made friends in the night watches. All through the dark hours and the dawning, the beast had guarded the door, suffering none to approach it. He now barred the way to Oleric, and the chamber echoed to his angry challenge.

"By the ten kings!" exclaimed the captain with a laugh. "You do raise up friends wherever you go, my brother. Here is one that dearly would love to make a breakfast off my lean shanks, armored as they are, and all because I would tell you that Shamar has brought to us another day."

At the call of Polaris, the dog backed out of the doorway, but still with a wary and suspicious eye to the movements of the red captain.

Mordo, the prison captain, was not in attendance, but certain of his servants were spreading the table near the center of the hall. The Americans and the Sardanians were gathered in a group about one of the pillars.

Everson looked wan, like one whose pillow had been ridden by evil visions. The others of the party seemed in better spirits and were talking among themselves. Zenas Wright gave evidence that his scientific zeal had only lain dormant. For now he noted all about him with a keen and kinding interest, paying his attention especially to the architecture of the lordly hall which had housed them, and its sculptures, of which there were many. Young Brooks' interest was fully as keen, if more material, as that of the geologist. The eyes of the ensign were all for the table preparations.

Seeing the party thus, and the broad bands of sunlight which streamed into the hall through windows of crystal high in the masonry, Polaris grew shamefaced.

"Now it seems that I alone, who of all should be wakeful, have slept dully like a wintered bear," he muttered.

"'Tis well. You have gained strength which perhaps shall not come amiss," Oleric answered.

Near the center of the hall a fountain played, its spray falling through a bar of sunshine which changed the silver drops to gold as they fell. Calling his morning greetings to his friend, Polaris went thither and laved his face and hands and smoothed his mass of tawny hair. The dog followed close at heel and lapped greedily from the fountain's basin.

"Strange that this brute should be here," said Oleric. "Do you know what manner of beast this is that so befriends you, Polaris?"

Polaris shook his head; nor did he at that time see fit to acquaint Oleric with the circumstances of the dog's appearance.

"This is one of the dogs the priests keep at the temple of Shamar," the captain informed. "There are few of the breed in the land, and all are at the temples of the god in the cities. Almost as sacred are these brutes as are the bulls, whereof you already know, and are likely to learn more. The holy men do say of them that they are dwelt in by the souls of heroes passed away, whom Shamar chooses to guard his temple gates, even as the bulls are inhabited by the souls of dead kings.

"I do not believe such tales," he added quickly. "But now you will see why Bel-Ar

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will be more than passing wroth at the death of the bull, believing as he does that it is a dwelling place for one of his ancestors, and that you may, indeed, have slain his father or his grandfather."

Oleric, who had breakfasted, sat by while the others ate. The dog, from the collar of which the captain read the name Rombar, signifying thunder, stood behind the seat of Polaris and ate with dignity whatever his self-appointed master passed to him. But he would take food from no other hand, not even from Rose Emer, who liked all dogs.

Thereafter, sleeping or waking, the huge beast remained at Polaris's side, and none could coax him thence. And many Maeronicans deemed that strange. But as no man, not even Shamar's priests, dared to interfere with the sacred brutes, except when they played their parts in the ceremonials of the god, the attendance of Rombar upon the stranger was permitted.

Under a guard of mailed foot-soldiers, led by Brunar, who was a captain in the palace regiment, the prisoners were marched from the ancient palace of Bel-Tisam to the newer palace of Bel-Ar. At their right, as they passed up the street called Chedar's Flight, was the wall, pierced by many gateways, of the Place of Games, with its basalt amphitheater and its arena.

As they passed they heard the hoofs of galloping steeds, the rumble of chariot wheels, and the cries of the charioteers, where the young lords of Adlaz exercised their horses. From slits in the wall low down near the pavement, issued the howling and snarling of wild beasts; for a menagerie was a part of the equipment of the Place of Games.

BEYOND the hippodrome, their way led around half the circle of the broad drive on which the four main avenues gave, and which surrounded the wonderful gardens of the Temple of the Sun. The Americans, three of whose number were widely traveled, marveled anew at the splendor of that mighty pile of white marble, its lofty columns, towers and domes, dazzling in the sunlight, their golden caps ablaze. Luxor and Karnac in the days when Pharaoh Rameses ruled in Egypt could not have shown the equal of this structure.

With armed men clanking on each side, the captives entered through a massive peristyle of vari-colored pillars which was the portal to the house of the king. Along a corridor in which four elephants might have found way and clearance to walk abreast, the guards conducted them. At each end of the corridor there stood ajar tall gates of bronze, their bars interlaced with heavy patterns of gleaming gold, encrusted with the luminous metal, known in Maeronica as orichalcum, and set with many precious gems.

Through the second gateway the prisoners were marched, and were in the audience chamber of Bel-Ar, the great king. It was similar in shape to the place where they had been quartered for the night; but there all similitude ceased. Bel-Tisam of old had sat in a plain and massive hall and been content. The house of Bel-Ar held treasures in metals and gems on its sculptured walls and pillars, aye, and on its floors, too, which could have paid the national debt of a wide and wasteful state.

Dull gold smoldered underfoot in the mosaic of the pavement. Gold and orichalcum glittered and shimmered on pillar and wall. Chairs and tables of stone and bronze and polished woods were heavy with the precious metal. Set in the bases of the seventy and six pillars which upheld the roof were patterns gorgeous in agate, lapis-lazuli, turquoise, quartz, and rock-crystal. Other and similar panels adorned the walls. Farther up, where the work in gold and orichalcum began—placed so high, perhaps, to be out of reach of avaricious fingers—were more precious stones. There topaz, moonstone, amethyst, opal, sapphire, diamond, and priceless ruby and emerald flaunted their hundred fires.

"Lordy!" muttered Zenas Wright under his breath to Ensign Brooks as they crossed the hall. "Give me a pick and a ladder and a half hour alone in which to use them, and you may have and welcome the rubies of Sardanes which went down with the *Minnetonka*."

Near a fountain, the jets of which fell and flowed over a grotto of opalescent glass lighted from within, sat the master of all this splendor, Bel-Ar, king of Maeronica and lord of the underseas. On no raised dais or lofty throne sat this monarch who was absolute in his own land. A high-backed chair of carved black wood sufficed him, raised from the flooring on a single slab of red porphyry, scarcely twelve inches high. On another chair at his right sat his queen. The two were in the center of a wide crescent of seats and benches, whereon sat the nobles and ladies of Maeronica who made up the court. Without the semicircle stood attendants and slaves. Farther back, ranged in a double line, was one full company, one hundred men, of the palace

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guard, all in bronze mail, and each carrying his bared sword.

Like a dull moth among a concourse of gaudy and fluttering butterflies was this powerful Maeronican king. He was attired simply in cloth of dark blue. A cloak of the same material had fallen back from his shoulders. On his knee rested a flat black cap of the same pattern that his meanest sailors wore. Only a light circlet of twisted gold, fashioned in the semblance of a slender serpent, set on his heavy black hair above his temples, and a short, broad sword which swung at his belt, distinguished the garb of Bel-Ar from that of the ordinary citizen of Adlaz.

Seeing these things, one looked into the king's face for royalty, and found it there. He sat with an elbow on the arm of his chair, his chin cupped in his right hand, so that it hid his mouth. His forehead was broad and low, his nose short and tilted slightly at its tip. His cheeks were rounded and well-shaped. His ears, almost hidden in the black hair, which was cut evenly around his neck, were small and delicately turned as a woman's. But every other feature was cast into insignificance and forgotten, when one looked at the king's eyes. Set far apart, they were extraordinarily large, and black, so that iris and pupil seemed as one. They were the eyes of a mystic, a far-seeing dreamer, but filled with subdued fires; eyes of a strong and self-willed man, one not to be tampered with or led. In contrast to them, the skin of the face was fair, almost pallid. The king's figure was above medium height, broad and powerfully framed. His years were not more than thirty-seven.

As the prisoners were brought near to him, Bel-Ar had fallen into a fit of abstraction. He gazed fixedly across the hall, seeing it not, nor its people and its walls. At his feet a little slave boy sat asleep, his head leaned against the leg of his king's chair, his small golden harp fallen across his lap.

If Bel-Ar was the dull moth, his consort, Queen Raissa, who sat beside him, was the most gorgeous of all the butterflies. She was younger than the king, by a full ten years. Her face was small and flower-like, with pouting lips and proud blue eyes that shone like stars. Hair yellow as the golden, shell-shaped comb which was set in it, was piled high on her head, and was yet in such abundance that two heavy braids fell down across her shoulders. She was robed in a graceful gown of pale blue, the bodice of which blazed with gems. Her fingers toyed with a costly fan, whereof the stem was ivory and the sticks the colored plumes of rare birds. She gazed curiously at the strangers whom the soldiers brought in, and when her eyes alighted upon Oleric they became eager.

AT THE edge of the open space just beyond the semicircle of the courtiers, the guards halted. For a few moments the silence in the hall was broken only by the low-toned gossip of gay lords and ladies, who paid scant attention to guards or prisoners. Then the queen touched Bel-Ar's knee with her fan and spoke a few words in his ear. He started from his reverie.

"Come hither, Brunar," he said in a deep, low voice. As he raised his head, it was to be seen that his chin was square and heavy, but that his mouth was lacking in the strength of his other features.

Brunar made his report, and was replaced by Oleric the Red, who bowed low before the king, his ready smile playing about his lips.

"You would make report of a fademe lost, Captain Oleric," said the king. "Doubtless a small matter to you, but meaning much to me, who ill can spare my fademes." He frowned.

"Not so, O king," replied the captain, composing his features and speaking earnestly. "As you know, not all of our engineers have learned to govern wisely the mighty force that gives the fademes life."

Bel-Ar nodded. "That is true," he said. "Now what of this engineer of yours?"

"Why, he was a careless fellow, and whoof! one day under his hands went engine and fademe. They lie in fragments on the sea-bottom near the great south cape on the way to the ocean named Pacific, and the crew lies with them."

"How is it, then, that you stand here to make report?"

"My star watched over me, O king. I floated to the surface, alone of all the fademe's crew. On the wreckage of the cabin I floated. I had by me my hamess (mask). I donned it. Later my senses departed me. I was taken up by a ship from the northern world, and was treated with kindness by these whom you see here. Driven by storm, that ship came to the coast of Maeronica, and—"

"Enough; I had the rest of the tale from Brunar," interposed Bel-Ar.

"But of your mission to the far Pacific? What of that?" questioned Raissa, leaning forward eagerly.

Again Oleric smiled, and smiling, drew

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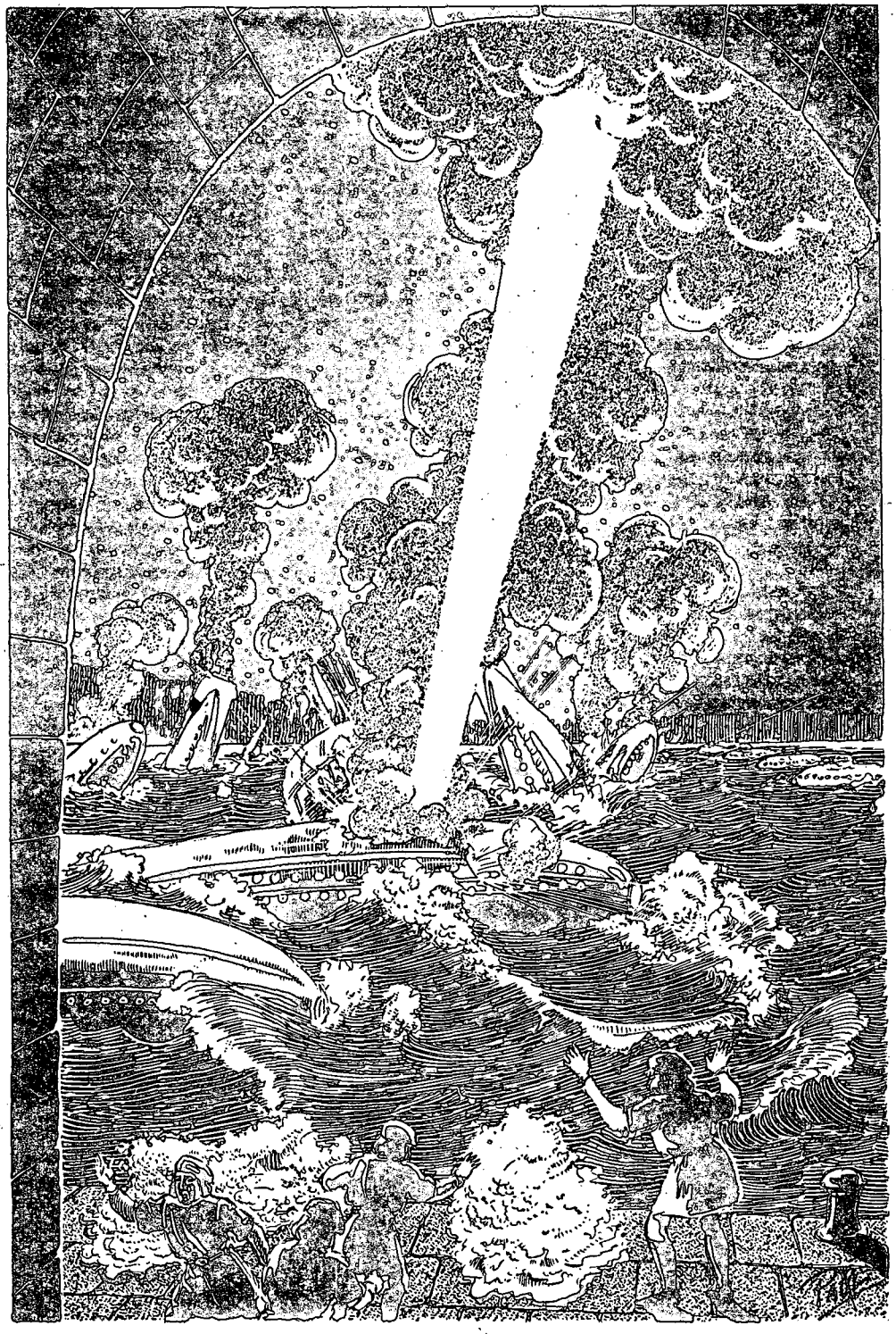

Like the evil genius of Adlaz, Minos rode on,
leaving only wreckage in his wake. . . .

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from his belt a small leather bag. He advanced; and kneeling, handed the bag to the queen.

"Oh! Lovely!" she gasped as she poured a part of its contents into her palm—pearls, five score or more of them, as fine as ever came from the ocean bed, she held. One great and lustrous globe of faint rose-pink she seized upon with a cry of delight. She held it out toward the king. "See! Is it *not* beautiful?" she exclaimed. She turned to the red captain.

"You have done well, indeed, good Oleric," she said quickly. "My king shall forgive you for the lost fademe, the losing of which was surely no fault of yours. And these—these be worth many fademes to me." She selected two of the pearls of fair size and goodly sheen and gave them to Oleric.

"You did venture your life to get them. Perchance some maid of Adlaz town shall look on you more kindly for the gift," she said.

Bel-Ar frowned; then he smiled, too.

"Well, Raissa has said it. I must agree; I suppose. I forgive you the fademe," he said, somewhat dryly, while the lords and ladies laughed. "Only sail no more ships at present, captain. Get you to the harbor, and there for a space relieve Atlo as captain of the port. I have need of him at the Kimbrian Wall, where the robbers of Ruthar have grown overbold.

"Now, another matter." The king's brow clouded. "Which of these foreigners slew the bull of Shamar? This one surely." He pointed to Minos. "Never saw I such a man."

"No, O king, not he," Oleric said. "He is from a far land in the southern snow wastes, which was destroyed by the earth-fires. There he was the king. The other one, the golden-haired man, it was, who slew the bull—to save a child—"

"Have done. The reason for the deed avails him not," Bel-Ar broke in. "Have him come hither, that I may judge."

OLERIC fetched Polaris Janess into the space before the throne. The son of the snows advanced with a firm step and halted directly in front of Bel-Ar, where he gazed at the king with steady eyes. Close at his heels came the great dog Rombar.

"Why does the man not bow?" inquired Bel-Ar harshly. "Where learned he his manners? And how does it come that he is attended by a sacred dog of Shamar, that seems ready to do battle for him?"

In truth, Rombar, who feared not kings, was ready for battle. He stood at the side of Polaris, his hackles raised and a rumbling challenge in his throat.

Bel-Ar regarded the pair of them sternly, though many in his court found much to admire in the powerful form and steadfast demeanor of the son of the wilderness.

Oleric spoke hastily in English: "Bow, brother; bow to the king; though I fear that 'twill not mend matters," he grumbled.

Polaris inclined his head shortly and continued to meet the gaze of the angered king. "His bow is grudging enough," said Bel-Ar to the captain; "but no matter."

Just then a tall old man in white and flowing robes came forward to the left of Bel-Ar's seat. He was lean of face, like an ancient hawk, and like a hawk's was his thin, curved beak. His eyes glittered with malice. On his breast, done in gold in the garment he wore, was the likeness of the rising sun, the insignia of the priests of Shamar.

Well Polaris knew that shape and face. It was the master chuckler that had disturbed him the night before.

"This man is marked by Shamar," the priest said in a high, cracked voice, and regarding Polaris hatefully. "As for the dog, 'tis sent by the god to watch that the man escape not his doom."

"Oleric, hold your peace," said Bel-Ar, as the stout captain was about to speak. "And flout not the holy Rhaen, lest it be the worse for you. I will judge." The king paused and ran his eyes over the other prisoners.

"He that slew the sacred bull, he shall be given over to the servants of Shamar, to be done with as the god shall will at the feast of years. He that was a king, he shall now serve a greater king. Let him be sent to the harbor, where strong backs are always welcome. The other two young men shall go into my mines. The old one shall be a scullion in my kitchens, as harder work doubtless would kill him.

"Take the two women and the slayer of the bull to the prison and keep them fast until Shamar claims them for the feast. The women must die. The law commands that no foreign woman, however fair, shall live in Maeronica. So may the ancient blood never be tainted. I have judged. Let it be so, and so writ down, unless the holy Rhaen, chief servant to Shamar, has other claims." Bel-Ar looked inquiringly at the priest.

Now it chanced that Lieutenant Everson, face to face with the man by whose decree his ship had perished, had fixed on the

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king a glance of undying hatred. None had noted it except the priest, Rhaen, who saw all things. He now asked that the naval man be turned over to the god along with Polaris. Bel-Ar nodded his assent.

At a sign from the king, Oleric led Polaris back to his companions. The judgment was ended. The guards closed in around the prisoners and marched them away.

CHAPTER IV

"DEAD MEN ARE BEHIND US"

ALONG the black avenue, back to the prison-house of Mordo, the captives were marched. For Oleric, through the friendship Brunar bore him, won from that captain the half of a day for his friends, that they might pass it together before the separation decreed by Bel-Ar.

Understanding little of what had taken place, and no word of what had been said in the audience chamber of the king—for Oleric the Red was their only interpreter—the prisoners still had the heart to look with curiosity upon the doings in that part of Adlaz town which lay along the way that they traversed.

As Zenas Wright trudged, his bright old eyes were busy, and he shook his white head often at the marvels which he saw. A group of the young bloods of Maeronica clattered by on horses. As they passed, the old geologist stared and stopped in his tracks, so that an impatient soldier of the guard hustled him with the butt of a spear.

"Gold, gold, everywhere," muttered Zenas as he started on. "They even shoe their horses with it."

In the hall where they had slept the friends gathered for council. Oleric had come in with them, and all eyes were turned to him. Before he would speak the captain insisted that meat and wine should be brought, and he set his helmet on the floor and ate with them.

Fate willed that it should be the last time that the seven friends should sit at the same table.

When the meal was ended, Oleric told simply and briefly of the judgment of Bel-Ar, holding back nothing.

For a moment, silence was his answer. Then Zenas Wright brought his jaws together with a snap.

"What! Me a scullion in that barbarian's greasy kitchen!" he barked. "Why not nursemaid to the royal brats?" Then Zenas groaned as his anger was swallowed in the realization of what was to befall the friends he whom had come to love so well.

With his topaz eyes ablaze, Polaris Janess sprang up from the table and stood over the captain.

"You, Oleric, who call yourself my friend, why did you not interpret this to us while we were in the hall yonder?" he asked quietly "Then had this kingdom been kingless." He glanced down at his sinewy hands. Suddenly he bent over and snatched the captain's sword from its sheath. So he, who had seen so much of fighting, made ready to fight again, and for the last time. For what else was left him but to give his life for his lady and go to his appointed place?

"Of those who come to take us, some at least shall go a long journey with us," he said as he toyed with the heavy blade.

Everson and Brooks, picked men who had sailed the seas for Uncle Sam, nodded their heads, saying nothing. There have been traditions in that service of which they were officers. When their time came they would uphold them.

White and straight, the Lady Memene stood up from the table and fixed her glorious eyes upon the Sardanian king. She plucked from the bosom of her gown a small, keen dagger, a blade of ilium, which a certain Kard the Smith had forged for her in far-away Sardanes. She reached the weapon across the table and into the hands of Minos.

"If I understand the words of this man aright, death waiteth," she said in the ancient Greek of her native land. "Memene prefers it at thy hands, O king of mine. Slay thou me and—and the unborn king, Minos." Her lips trembled pitifully, and her voice broke. Then she became hard again, and with a fire in her eyes. "Join thou then with our good brother here, and slay, and slay, and slay—for this is an evil land. And begin with this man whom we saved from the sea, and who is evil, also. See! He smileth, while we are about to die."

Oleric, who had made no move when his sword was taken from him, sat quietly, studying the faces about him and smiling his enigmatical smile.

"What does the lady say?" he asked of Polaris.

Janess told him.

When Rose Emer heard, she threw her arms about the Sardanian princess and hid her face in Memene's bosom. Presently she looked up, a mist of tears in her gray eyes, but her voice was clear and steady as she said:

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"If we are to die, let us die together. Polaris, let me go with Memene."

Oleric's smile vanished. He held up his hand.

"Let there be no more talk of dying—at least not for many long years," he said, and there were both feeling and strength in his tones.

The others looked at him, wondering what his words portended.

"Now the time has come for me to avow myself," continued the red captain. "I will speak all that has been in my mind, and you shall judge if I be worthy of your trust—for trust to me you must, if we are to see a straight way out of this tangle."

He turned to Polaris.

"My brother," he said, "do you recall that yesterday, when you had slain the bull of Shamar, I said to you that Bel-Ar would be as little likely to forgive you that deed as to forgive one who confessed himself a follower of the Goddess Glorian of Ruthar?"

Polaris nodded. "I remember," he answered, "but understand not."

"That is my crime," said Oleric. "I am of Ruthar, a follower of the Goddess Glorian, and a faithful one. I will make clear to you what you do not understand. Listen. I will make the tale brief.

"In the long ago, the very long ago—so long that most of the world you know was wilderness and its peoples barbarians—a mighty people flourished on an island in the ocean that you name Atlantic. They called themselves the Children of Ad, or Adlaz, after the eldest of the ten kings that once ruled in that land. Tradition has it that their island was the first cradle of civilization; for they, because of their isolation, alone of all the peoples of the earth, dwelt in peace and plenty, and were not wasted by wars.

"If the ancient maps were truly drawn, that island of Adlaz lay opposite and southward from the straits of a fair sea, and the straits were known as the Pillars of Heracles. With time and the growth of the nation of Ad came greed upon her children, greed and the love of conquest. Great navies carried their armies east and west. Along both shores of that blue sea, which you know as Mediterranean, they gained a foothold, and made the nations bend to their yoke. Westward they sailed to another continent across the ocean, conquering the red men of the wildernesses there, and founding provinces and building cities.

"Then in the flower of her pride and conquests, Adlaz was cut down. Both sides of the Mediterranean she held as far as the gates of Egypt and the islands of the Hellenes. But the nation of the Hellenes was the rock on which the fortunes of Adlaz split. A wise and crafty king led the Hellenes in battle to withstand the flood of invasion from the island empire. He beat their army and nearly destroyed it. He trapped the mighty navy that had sailed from Adlaz against the Hellenes. While Egypt sat quaking, waiting to bend the neck to the heel of the invader, the Hellenes, under their wise leader, turned the tide.

"BALKED and broken, those who had gone forth to conquer returned to their island. But the great sea-god whom they worshiped must have been sorely angered at their failure. For in one day he arose and swallowed their island. The land heaved and split; the mountains were rent, and vomited up both fires and waters, and the entire island disappeared into the depths of the sea. East and west on the two continents, the barbarians rose against the colonies of Adlaz, and they too perished. O'Connell, the slave, who was learned, told me that so utterly was the race of Adlaz wiped from the earth that naught remains, excepting the half-buried ruins of some of their cities, which stand in the jungles of the western continent, concerning the very origin of which the minds of men are vague. And of the island of Adlaz itself, he told that it was only a dim tradition, a myth, the truth of which is doubted even by the learned.

"But all of Adlaz did not perish. A part, a small part, of the mighty fleet which had sailed against the Hellenes was not lost, but was driven southward in the tidal-waves of the inundation which swallowed the island.

"Afloat, but with every hand in the world turned against them, their colonies crumbling before the wrath of the barbarians, those chiefs of Adlaz turned for guidance to the son of one of their princes who was on one of the ships. Of his wisdom that prince told them that since they were hated of all the world, and that even the hand of the sea-god was set against them—why, they would sail to the end of the world to find them an abiding place, until in the fulness of time they should once more rule the earth. So they passed like a flame down the coasts of the western continent until they reached this place; and here they stopped and stayed, main-

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taining the old traditions of their race, keeping themselves apart—a hateful people, waiting for the day of which their leader told them, when they shall once more conquer the world.

"But even in those days they found this land, which is warmed strangely by the ocean currents, was inhabited. A free and fearless race of barbarians dwelt here, and them the warriors of Adlaz were never able to subdue. Great beasts dwelt here, also—beasts so mighty that the earth shook when they walked—and the Children of Ad found themselves beset by troubles in their new land. But they throve. Though they could not conquer the barbarians, they drove them from the north of the island. And though they could not slay the mighty beasts, they affrighted them with fire, burning whole forests, and forced them also to the south. At one point the land is narrow, scarcely sixty of your English miles across. There the Children of Ad builded them a wall so tall and thick that even the beasts might not push it down.

"On the other side of that wall—the Kimbrian Wall—lies Ruthar, a land of forests and hills and rivers, but a fair land. And there dwell the Rutharians and the beasts; and down through all the years to this day there has been war across the wall.

"Now to the meat of this tale of mine, which grows long. In Ruthar there is a prophecy, also, to match that of those who call themselves Maeronicans. It is that there shall come up from the sea a mighty man with yellow hair like unto gold, who shall break down the Kimbrian Wall and let the beasts pass through, and who shall lead the chiefs of Ruthar in a warfare that shall break the power of Adlaz, and cast down the hateful kings and the cruel religion of Shamar. For that man the Rutharian chieftains always wait, and with them waits the Goddess Glorian, who is more than any king or chief."

Oleric paused, and looked long and earnestly into the face of Polaris.

"That is my tale, my brother," he said. "And if you are not the man of the ancient prophecy of Ruthar, at least I believe that you will serve."

Breathlessly Zenas Wright had followed the course of the red captain's words. The scientist could contain himself no longer.

"Atlantis!" he cried. From face to face about the table he looked, with a shadow of awe in his eager eyes. "Just so surely as we are sitting here—if this man tells the truth, and I think that he does—we are among the descendants of the people of the lost continent of Atlantis. Word for word, his story fits in with that which the old Egyptian priest at Sais told to Solon, the Greek, and which Plato recorded. I have read it all in the compilation by Ignatius Donnelly, in which he gathered all the evidence which he could find in the world to prove that Atlantis was not a myth."

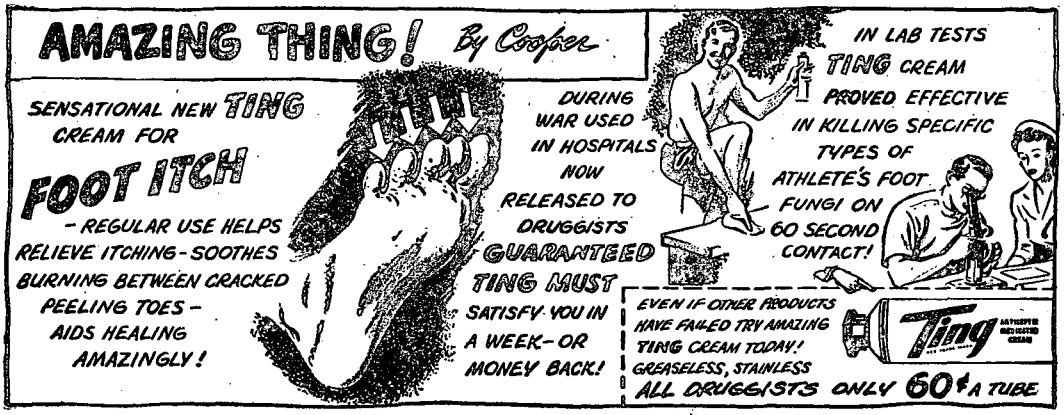
Zenas sat back with half-closed eyes. A long, low whistle passed his lips.

"What do you call the luminous metal with which your helmet and armor are decorated?" he asked of Oleric.

"It is called orichalcum," replied the captain.

Wright nodded. "It is the same," he said. "Plato wrote that such was the name of a similar metal, of which the Atlanteans had the secret. They delved it from the ground. It was far more precious to them than gold. In their temples stood columns of it, on which their laws were carved."

"O'Connell told me that there were still traditions in the world of the continent that was; but he never told me this," Oleric said. "You are right. In the Temple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of Shamar, here in Adlaz, such a column stands, and on it the laws are writ. On it, too, is the prophecy of Maeronica, against which I now match the prophecy of Ruthar, whose son I am."

He looked at Polaris. "Say, brother, how is it with you? Are you minded to come with me to Ruthar and try a tilt at the Kimbrian Wall—a tilt for a kingdom?"

Polaris had heard the tale of Oleric with grave and earnest attention, studying the face of the captain as he talked. Now the son of the snows laughed dryly.

"Mad talk, Oleric the Red," he said. "I am not the hero of your prophecy; and if I were, how are we to come from Adlaz to this Ruthar of which you tell us so glibly; and when we are come there, if that be possible, how are we to break down the wall which has stood against your armies for years—"

"So it must seem to you," interrupted Oleric, with clouding brow. "Mad talk, indeed; and perhaps it is. But here in Adlaz is death—death and slavery. I know a way to Ruthar. For the matter of the wall, I have one question to put. Well answered, all will be well.

"HERE in Maeronica there are some few things in which the folk have progressed as far ahead of the rest of the world as the world has outstripped them in most others. Of these are the fademes and their power of destruction—the mighty force of which even I know can only be used beneath the sea. On land, that force is powerless except to use as a light. In battle the Maeronicans fight as did their forefathers, bearing the arms that you have seen. I know that out in the world men have mastered the secret of engines which slay from afar, casting globes of metal which fly apart with a loud noise, rending all that is near. Such I saw on the ship yonder.

"We have, as you reckon time, nearly six months before the Feast of Years, when doom will be meted out to those who are marked for death. I know that is not time enough, nor do I think we have the means to construct such engines. But, say—has no one among you the knowledge to make the stuff which you feed into them? If there is such a one, why, I know in Ruthar a laboratory where he might work, with many willing hands to do his bidding. I have tried it myself, but have discovered nothing. Surely one of you, who are instructed, shall do better. So might we destroy even the great wall."

He paused, and gazed hard at Zenas Wright and then at Lieutenant Everson.

"*An explosive!*" Zenas Wright almost shouted the words. "You have a brain in that red head, my boy. With the proper chemicals it might be done." He clapped Everson on the shoulder. "With you to help me, it might be done. What do you think, lieutenant?"

"I would do most anything to get a chance at this nest of devils," said Everson, and his eyes glittered. "I have not trusted this man. I do not know that I trust him now. But if he is playing fair, there seems no other way. Whatever you decide to do, I am with you, and will do my best. If we can find the chemicals, we can make an explosive powerful enough to move a few tons of stone, if that will do any good."

"Break you the wall, and I will promise you the rest of the trick," the captain cried, "or Ruthar will die to the last man on the road to Adlaz!"

He considered for a moment.

"One man I can surely take with me to Ruthar," he said. "Two will double, aye more than double the risk; and three would more than triple it. Still, it may be accomplished. I must have a little time; but I will do my best.

"Now, my brother, what say you? If I can bring it about so that you and the old man here, Father Zenas, and this other, who, though he trust me not, I will yet play fair by—if I can manage it that these go with me to Ruthar—will you come, also?"

"What of these others?" Polaris asked, and looked at Rose Emer.

"Here they must stay," Oleric answered. "'Twill be hard enough to take the three of you—and slaying will be done before it is accomplished. It is impossible to take more. By the way which we shall go, no woman might pass undetected. But I tell you they shall come to no harm in your absence. The very law of the land protects them. They be marked for the ceremonies of Shamar. Until the appointed time, not even the king himself dare harm them. Bethink you, brother; this is the only way."

"Yonder on the ship you made a promise, Oleric," replied Polaris. "I think you will try to keep it. I trust you. But there are other things to consider." He addressed himself to Rose Emer.

"Lady, you have heard this madness, which yet, as says the captain, does seem to be the only road save that to death. In

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such things ofttimes the heart of a woman is wiser than the brains of men. Let your heart answer. Shall I go to Ruthar, and with this man and his people fight my way back to Adlaz, if it may be done?"

"THE future of this company hangs on your word, lady," put in Oleric. "And I make another promise. By day and by night I will not leave the side of my brother. If he shall find that in any word I have lied, if he shall meet with any treachery through me, then let him wring this red head from off my shoulders."

"If we stay here, we must die to-day, or be separated and die later," Rose Emer said with a shudder. "And our friends, if they do not die, face a life of slavery." She looked into the face of Polaris, and though her lips trembled and the tears started to her gray eyes, she said bravely:

"Go to Ruthar, and come back if you can. If you do not come, I will know that you have done all that a man can do."

"I will go with you, Oleric," Polaris said simply. "Now, what is your plan?"

"This," answered the captain. "When the guards come, as they will presently, you, my brother, will go with them to the dungeons that lie below this house. Though they are cut in the rock they are lighted well and are not terrible. You will not fare badly there. The ladies will be quartered above here, and I will exert my influence to see that they are treated well. These others will not fare so well; but they are men, and can stand it. Let them do as they are bid without protest. Within ten days from this day I will plan to have you out of your prison, and will contrive, also, to bring with me Father Zenas and the captain of the ship. By stealth or by force, we shall seize a marizel, pass through the hidden canal from Adlaz to the harbor, thence to the sea and down the coast to Ruthar.

"I shall have some aid; for within the walls of Adlaz there is one other man of Ruthar who is faithful to me. You may wonder how it is that I, who am of Ruthar and hate Adlaz, yet am a captain in the service of Bel-Ar. Years ago I passed the Kimbrian Wall, coming as a spy and giving it out that I was the son of Maeronican parents taken captive in a foray; that I had been born in Ruthar, but had escaped into my own country. Here I have stayed at the bidding of the Goddess Glorian, ready against the time for which all Ruthar waits. Bel-Ar likes men of brains. I have some, and I have risen to be one of his captains. Also, I have learned much. That is all my story."

"Who is the Goddess Glorian?" Rose Emer asked. "Is she the queen of Ruthar?"

Oleric's eyes widened at the question; but he answered readily enough:

"Yes, lady; she is the queen."

"You say that there are great beasts in Ruthar," said Zenas Wright. "What are they—elephants?"

"No; they are not what you call elephants," replied the captain. "O'Connell thought they were until he saw them. Then he gave them another name, which I have forgot. He told me of elephants; but they must be puny beasts compared to those which dwell in the forests of Ruthar. We call them amalocs. This man is a giant." He pointed to Minos, who stood six feet eight on his naked feet. "But were he twice as tall, he could not look across the back of an amaloc. But they are shaped like the elephants of which O'Connell told, and, like them, they are tusked. Their bodies are covered with red wool—almost as red as is my own thatch."

"Elephas primigenius! Mammoths, no less," said Zenas. And he added under his breath, "I will believe that when I see them, my friend."

Low as were his words, Oleric heard them.

"You shall see them, Father Zenas," he said, and laughed.

Presently came the guards, and the friends were separated. Some of them were never to be reunited.

DEEP in the rock below the old palace of Bel-Tisam, where Mordo ruled, the guards led Polaris Janess, and left him there. Oleric had spoken truly concerning the place, and the captive might have fared much worse in a modern prison in a civilized land. For the place was roomy and well ventilated, and, above all, it was clean. A chamber or cell, it was, some forty feet square by thirty feet in height. Its outer wall was the living rock. On the other three sides was masonry. A circular door of bronze, small and of great strength, was its only entrance.

Through that door from the corridor without stepped Polaris, and behind him, close as a shadow, padded the huge dog, Rombar, rumbling in his throat so that the guards shrank from him. The door clanged shut, and the bars and wards clashed into place. The guards had neither bound nor chained Polaris. They had not even searched his clothing. The thickness

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of the dungeon walls was their guarantee that he would do no mischief; and besides, they went well armed.

Air entered the chamber through mortises in the wall near the ceiling and above the ground level, where began the foundation of the palace. It was lighted by a single globe, with its enclosed curious battery—mitzl, the Maeronicans called it; but the Americans had decided that the source of the light was some new application of electricity.

By the light from the globe Polaris saw that he was not alone in the cell. A small man, whose features were concealed by a mat of unkempt gray hair and a shaggy beard, sat on a low cot in the angle of the wall nearest to the door. He was clothed in rags.

This man did not look up when another was thrust in to break his solitude, but bent low over something which he had on the cot, swaying back and forth as he sat, and crooning softly to himself.

Polaris cast his fellow prisoner a glance, and then fell to pacing up and down the length of the cell. His mood was gloomy. Above him somewhere through those gray walls dwelt his dear lady; but, ah, how far away! For he was powerless now to comfort her or to aid. Oleric would keep faith. Of that he was sure; but his heart misgave him mightily lest the plans of the captain should go awry.

Yes; above him were Rose and Lady Memene, who through the long weeks of their prisonment, each night when they went to rest, would kneel and pray for his welfare and that of Minos and the others, and that all plans might prevail.

Presently the son of the snows sat himself on a second cot on the far side of the chamber, and fell to fondling Rombar and toying with the dog's pointed ears.

"Good Rombar," he said. "Good fellow and comrade."

At his words, the man in the corner sprang up from his cot as though fire had touched him. He shrieked hoarsely and tottered across the floor, moving and clawing at the air with his hands. Unheeding the snarling menace of Rombar, he came on until he stood in front of the cot where Polaris sat holding the dog back by the collar.

The man bent over, resting his hands on his knees, and peered into Polaris's face with darkling, rheumy eyes.

"Hinglish!" he croaked, gasping for his breath. "Hinglish! Did Hi 'ear a Hinglish word, or was I a-dreamin'? Sye?"

He trembled in a terrible eagerness.

"You did, indeed," Polaris said gently. "Now tell me how you came here, who speak it also, and who are you?"

"Gor'bly me; Hi never 'oped to 'ear another Hinglish word in this life—me wot's rottin' 'ere into my grave!" the man said. "Gor'! Gor'!" He subsided into a tattered heap on the floor of the cell, covered his eyes with his shaking, grimy hands, and sobbed hysterically.

Restraining the dog, which would have sprung upon the weeping man, Polaris leaned forward and patted the poor fellow on the shoulder.

"Who are you, and how do you come to be in a Maeronican dungeon?" he asked.

"Jack Melton's me nyme, sir," the man said brokenly. "Hi'm from old Lunnon, Gor' bless 'er! Hi was cook on the ship *Aldine*, sir, from 'Ong-Kong to Durban, round the Cape. We got off our course, and the bloody devils sunk us—skewered us like a mutton shank, sir, with a streak of light. An' w'y in 'ell they did it, sir, is more than Hi can tell.

"Hi floated free on a cask—a biscuit cask, sir. Or mayhap it was a 'encoop; Hi've forgot, Hi was that flustered. Hup bobs a bloomin' big gold ball from the sea—it's Gord's truth. They took me aboard, an' they brought me ashore. They sets me to work in their mines; but Hi'd not do a stroke for them, sir. Hi near killed one of the bosses. Then they brought me here, sir. Oh, Gor'! Oh, Gor'-a-me!"

He broke out weeping afresh and rocked himself back and forth.

"How long have you been here?" questioned Polaris.

"That Hi can't tell, sir," Melton replied. "Hi used to keep count of the weeks an' months; but Hi lost it. Mayhap 'alf a year; mayhap a year."

Melton fell silent for a time. Then he chuckled to himself and tottered to his feet.

"*Hi'll* get even with 'em, sir," he said. "Never fear; *Hi'll* get even. Come an' see, sir."

He took Polaris by the hand and led him across the floor to the other cot. "Look!" he said, and fumbled back the ragged covers.

Beady black eyes glistened among the rags. A sharp and whiskered gray snout was thrust forth, twitching and sniffing; then another and another. A mother rat and two half-grown young ones were hidden in Melton's bed. Out they crept to their

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master's coaxing, only to scurry back, squeaking, when Rombar thrust his head from behind Polaris, whining with eagerness to be at them.

"Keep the tyke back, sir," said Melton. "'E frights 'em. This 'ere's 'Enrietta, an' 'ere's Bobby an' Bill. 'Enrietta's an old fool, an' Bobby's no better; but Bill, 'e's a wonner, sir. See!"

From his breast he took a splinter of wood, to which was attached a bit of frayed red rag, on which he had rudely drawn in black the lines of the Union Jack. He placed one of the young rats on his palm, and laid the sliver with its frayed shred of bunting in front of the little animal. Softly he began to whistle the bars of "God Save the King."

"Come, Bill; 'urry," he said, and resumed his low whistling. The rat took up the flag in its teeth and sat on its haunches in its master's hand. As long as the whistling continued the little beast shook its head vigorously, waving the tiny emblem. When Melton ceased the anthem, Bill let fall the flag and swarmed, squeaking, down the man's arm, to nestle away among the rags at his breast.

"Gor'bly me, Bill, you're a wonner!" Melton said with pride. He placed his strange pet back with the others and pulled the coverlet over them.

"Listen. Hi'll tell you wot no man knows," he whispered to Janess. "They're hoff a plyge-ship. 'Enrietta an' Bobby an' Bill is. They carried it to us from a bloomin' junk at 'Ong-Kong. The cap'n was dyin' of it in 'is cabin when the ship went down, sir. And Hi'm a-nursin' of 'em along, sir. Hi saved 'Enrietta, and she became a mother, sir. When there's enough of them, Hi shall loose them, sir. That's 'ow Hi'll get even. Gor'bly me! Hi'll kill hevery beggar in this land with the plyge. 'Enrietta an' Bobby an' Bill will do it, sir."

Melton sat down on his cot again, and crooned to himself over his pets. He seemed to forget the presence of Janess. Neither then or afterward did he ask Polaris any questions as to how he came to share his prison. Polaris drew away from him and went back to his own side of the cell. He saw that the man was mad.

TWICE each day one of Mordo's guards brought the captives their meals—bread and meat and water in generous measure, enough for the men and the dog. Melton from his rations fed his whiskered family.

With his pocket-knife and a bit of wood from the frame of his cot, the son of the snows made shift to keep track of the passing of the days, cutting a nick in the wood for each. "God send that they be not many before the coming of Oleric," he prayed fervently.

One night he was startled from his sleep by an uproar in the chamber. Melton's cursing and shrieking was intermingled with the angry snarls of Rombar. Polaris sprang up and threw off the cloth with which he was wont to darken the mitzl globe when he slept.

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Melton was crouched in the middle of the cell. His face was livid and contorted. Tears of rage were on his cheeks, and his breath was coming in gasps. His lips were writhed away from his ragged teeth. In front of him, tensed and ready to spring, was Rombar. On the floor, where it had dropped from the dog's jaws, lay a little bundle of gray fur, still twitching feebly.

Before the impending grapple, Polaris bounded between them and jerked the dog back by the collar.

"What is it?" he cried. "What ails you, Melton?"

Then Janess saw the maimed little fragment of life on the floor, and his face saddened.

"'Fore Gord, 'e's murdered my 'Enrietta!" howled Melton. "The tyke's murdered 'er, Hi sye! And Hi'll kill 'im, Hi will—and you, too, if you tries to stop me! And you, too, Hi says!"

He staggered toward Janess and lunged out with his right hand. Something glistened in the light as he struck. Polaris avoided the blow, and caught and wrenched the outstretched arm. A slender bar of iron fell tinkling to the floor. Janess picked it up. Where it had come from he did not know; but Melton, by patient rubbing against the stones of the wall, had ground it to a needle point.

"Let me at 'im!" the crazed man shrieked. "Hi'll tear 'im with me bare 'ands!"

Polaris pushed him back.

"I am sorry, very sorry, for what he has done," he said. "But he is my good friend, and I shall not let him come to harm. He did but follow the instincts of his nature."

Melton stared at him for a moment, and then, weeping and cursing, retired to his cot. Far into the night Polaris heard him moaning and mumbling to himself, and pitied him.

Janess hid the weapon under his own pillow. Then with strips of his bedding he wove a stout cord, and thereafter when he slept he tied Rombar fast to a leg of the bed.

* * *

Days passed away—ten days, eleven, twelve, and still another. And yet there was no sign of Oleric. Polaris's stout heart sank.

In the dark hours of the fourteenth day he awoke. He heard the grating of bronze hinges. At the side of his bed, Rombar growled softly. Polaris snatched the hood from the light.

The door of bronze was open. The mitzl rays shone on the tall form of a man in golden armor.

Oleric had come!

"I am late at my tryst," whispered the red captain, "but I could not manage it sooner. Now we must haste, or 'twill be too late forever." He grinned. "I see your beard has grown somewhat," he said. "Perchance those bristles shall serve well. You are an ill man to disguise. Who is here?" he asked as he caught sight for the first time of Melton, who had not awakened.

"A poor crazed English sailor," Polaris answered. He crossed the chamber, with Rombar at his heels; for he had stopped to undo the rope.

"What? The brute, too?" groaned Oleric.

"I fear we must," Polaris said. "If I leave him, he will rouse the prison with his howling, and I will not slay him. He has been too good a friend. Can we not manage to take him?"

"Aye; bring him," grumbled the captain. "First fetch yonder light."

Janess took down the globe. As he swung it toward Oleric, he saw that the hands of the captain were splashed red with blood. Oleric noted his glance.

"Dead men are behind us," he said. "Thrice tonight have I used my sword—once at the mines, where I got Everson, and twice above. Two of the men of Mordo will turn no more prison keys. Come!"

He stepped cautiously out through the door.

Polaris glanced across to where the mad Cockney lay breathing heavily.

"Some day, if it be given me, I will open this door again and set you free, John Melton," he whispered.

He stooped and went out through the doorway, and Rombar followed.

OUTSIDE the door of the dungeon-chamber Polaris stumbled over the form of a tall man in armor, who lay with his face to the floor.

"More death?" Janess asked of Oleric, who busied himself with the bolts of the bronze door.

"Not so," said the captain with a chuckle, as he shot the last bar home in its socket. "Only the death that good wines bring. He has the best part of seven bottles in his skin."

He looked up at Polaris apologetically.

"Bel-Ar would flay him for this night's work, did he find him," he said. "You say the dog has been a good friend to you. Well, this man Mordo, with all his glum

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ways, is a good fellow. I will not leave my old drinking companion to the mercy of Bel-Ar."

Without answer, Polaris handed the light to Oleric, and stooped and swung the limp figure of Mordo to his shoulder.

Oleric glanced at the keys in his hand and then at the door.

"I'll not turn the locks," he said. "I would not have the poor slave within starve while they made new keys."

He led the way along the corridor, past a broad stone stairway, to the south wall of the old palace, where it fronted on the black avenue called Chedar's Flight. There in the wall were other doors of bronze. Oleric paused before one of them.

"Will I ever enter Mordo's wine-cellars again, I wonder?" he said. He found the key and opened the heavy door. Within, the light disclosed rack after rack, seemingly without end, of dust-covered flagons. They threaded their way among them until Oleric found what he sought. In the stone floor of the chamber in a far corner was a round trap-door of bronze. The captain had to tug one of the wine-racks to one side to disclose it.

"Lay Mordo down, comrade, and help," he said, when his utmost strength had failed to stir the door.

Polaris, still balancing his burden on his shoulder, bent down and caught the ancient ring of the door in one hand. Before Oleric could lay hold to help him he straightened, the mighty muscles of his back cracking with the effort. The door was open.

The trap yawned on a dark stairway leading down through the rock. Far below sounded the plashing of waters. "Mind where you set your feet," warned Oleric as he started down.

"Where are Everson and the old man?" asked Polaris.

"They wait us below in the hidden canal—they and one other," replied the captain. "They entered by another way, while I was busied in the house of Mordo."

Oleric closed the trap and left the keys on the stair-top. Down fully threescore steps they went, and stood on a wharf of stone at the edge of a narrow canal that had been cut in the rock. Overhead, the roof was arched and vaulted. At the lip of the wharf was moored a small marizel, the golden plates of which caught the rays of the lamplike fire.

"All the way from the Temple of the Sun to the harbor of Adlaz this canal leads, cut through the rock underneath Chedar's Flight," said Oleric. He stepped on the rear deck of the little craft and struck softly on its door, which was opened at once. A short man of middle age came onto the deck. He was clothed in the garb of a sailor. As the light fell on him, Polaris saw that his hair was almost as red as that of Oleric.

"Now here is another good man of Ruthar," said the captain. And to the man he said, "Urk, this is the man whereof I have told you." From head to foot, Urk gave the son of the snows a long and searching glance. Then he folded his arms on his breast and bowed low.

With Mordo on his shoulder, Polaris stepped onto the deck and through the door, followed by Rombar.

Oleric closed the double doors of the craft, and Urk, who was skilled about the engines, at once got her under way. Submerged and showing no light, they crept cautiously down the canal toward the sea.

IN THE cabin of the marizel were Everson and Wright—though Polaris had to look twice and then again to recognize the geologist. Zenas wore the mean black of a servant in the king's kitchens. His white hair had been bobbed and his beard shaved from him. But his little black eyes were as bright and restless as ever, and his voice was hearty as he wrung the hand of Polaris and said:

"Lordy, son, but it's good to see you."

Eversorf, who had discarded the dirty garments of a delver in the earth for the full golden armor of a Maeronican captain, caught Polaris's hand as Zenas relinquished it.

"Our work has begun," he said, "and begun well. I shall distrust this man no more." He pointed to Oleric. "He has kept his promise in blood. He released me tonight, and he killed a man to do it."

As they neared the harbor, Oleric explained that they would be forced to leave the marizel in the canal and cross the open court of the harbor to the wharves.

"Else we must undergo inspection by the guards at the mouth of the canal," he said. "There is a gate there, and no marizel may pass without inspection. My lucky star it was that made Bel-Ar name me captain of the port in Atlo's stead. But even I could not pass you through the guards. Their eyes are keen, and one of us at least is a marked man in Adlaz." He glanced at Polaris. "There be too many of them to slay," he added. "I would have fitted you out with a suit of mail, brother; but there

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is none in Maeronica of a size to cover those shoulders of yours—unless it be that of Bel-Ar, which I could not well borrow."

"When we leave this craft, what then, Oleric?" Polaris asked.

"I have another waiting at the end of the southern quay," replied Oleric. "Urk knows the harbor as he knows the palm of his hand. Once through the outer channel, then down the coast to Ruthar."

They left the marizel moored in the canal and went up through a passage in the rock to where a door led into the great arched tunnel above, where Chedar's Flight ended at the harbor of Adlaz town. Now there was only the crossing of the wharf and all would be well.

But hark! As Oleric laid his hand on the door of the passage, came the thunder of hoofs through the tunnel, and a steel rider on a white horse flashed past and clattered across the court to the warehouses. He rode furiously, and as he neared the quays he cried out.

Oleric tore the door open.

"Our work behind there is overtaking us!" he cried. "We must run for it!"

Polaris shifted Mordo's weight from his shoulder to his arms and bounded across the pavement at the heels of the captain. Behind came Wright, Everson, and Oleric's Rutharian henchman. Rombar leaped at the side of Polaris.

Lights flashed ahead of them as they ran. When they neared the south quay, they saw that the way to it was barred by a thin line of men in steel, among whom glittered the golden armor of the captain of the canal guard.

Casting a glance over his shoulder as he ran, to note the disposal of his own party, Oleric drew his sword and charged the line. The guard captain leaped out to meet him, shield up and sword aloft. Him Oleric cut down with a single stroke, laughing as he struck. In another instant Everson's blade was out and busy. His cutlass exercises at old Annapolis stood him well. The line of steel gave. The other three fugitives, running together, dashed through and gained the quay. But behind them came many men.

Polaris laid Mordo on the wharf and looked about him for a weapon. The door of the nearest warehouse was made fast with a bar of bronze or steel, nearly eight feet in length. Janess tore it from its rests. At the end of the quay he saw the marizel of Oleric riding in its moorings, and saw that Urk had clambered aboard it and was making all ready to cast off.

Whirling his ponderous weapon, which was a weight to tax the strength of an ordinary man to lift from the ground, Polaris rushed into the thick of the press, where the red captain and the naval lieutenant fought side by side.

"Get you to the boat!" he shouted. "When all is ready, whistle that I may know."

Clang! The metal bar fell, and three men in steel went down under its sweep. With the agility of a panther, the son of the snows leaped and struck again. At his side black Rombar raged like a demon. Before those terrible blows no man, however well begirt in steel, could stand and live.

The Maeronican fighting men drew back, aghast. The way to the wharf was clear.

Laughing aloud, Oleric drew out of the fight and ran along the wharf to the marizel. Everson paused at the side of Polaris.

"Best go on," Janess told him. "I shall need no aid. Or, if you stay, stand to one side a bit. I have need for much room."

Once more the Maeronican men at arms closed in. Polaris, with his bar, charged them, shouting; for his blood was up. They should take him back to no dungeon when his freedom beckoned so near. Two more armored men fell, their mail cracking like egg-shell under the clanging flail that opposed them. Another went down under the murderous jaws of Rombar who fought at his master's thigh.

Loud and clear then sounded the whistle of Oleric. Hurling the bar in the faces of the bewildered men of the guard, the son of the snows ran to the end of the wharf and sprang to the deck of the marizel. Everson entered the door just ahead of him. Oleric and Urk already had stowed Mordo within the vessel and cut loose the mooring ropes.

As he paused for an instant on the rear deck to call the great dog to him, Polaris saw a giant figure come from one of the stone warehouses and run out to the end of the next quay. In the dusk, and at that distance, he yet was able to recognize Minos.

"It is I, Polaris!" Janess shouted. "We leave for Ruthar, if we may win through. Farewell for a space, until we come again."

Back came the deep voice of the king in answer:

"Fare thee well, my brother!" he cried in the ancient Greek of Sardanes. "May the high God guide thy footsteps."

Many a time in after years did the son

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of the snows recall to mind that scene: the great, circular basin of the harbor of Adlaz, dim under the light from the stars; the glittering fademes that were riding at anchor; the twinkling of mitzl globes along the wharves, where men ran to and fro; the court and its huge, black archway; the armored men of the guard coming on across the wharf; and the tall form of the Sardanian king standing at the end of the quay and waving farewell.

Reenforcements had come to the Maeronican guards, and they rushed the quay. But Urk had his engine going. The marizel shot out into the harbor. In a moment more the little craft had dived beneath the surface. Like an arrow, it clove through the under water. Crafty steersman was Urk. Through the harbor he drove the marizel in safety, and through the tunnel to the sea, meeting no incoming danger. Once out of the channel, he turned the nose of the craft southward, down the coast toward Ruthar.

Miles away, amid the dim Rutharian forests, fierce-eyed men gripped their sword-hilts firmer, and prayed to their stars and their goddess for the safe making of that journey and the glory of the war that was to come. For word had come to Ruthar—over the Kimbrian Wall it had come—that Oleric the Red had turned his face toward home again, bringing with him the man for whom a nation waited.

CHAPTER V

WHERE THE ILLIA MEETS THE SEA

IN THE watches of the night arose a great clamor and outcry in the old palace of Bel-Tisam. So loud was the din that it aroused Rose Emer and the Lady Memene from their slumbers in the chamber off the ancient hall where they were quartered. In the outer corridors they heard the clang of feet of armored men and their hoarse shouts as they called to one another. This grew faint and passed away, and then swelled loud and near again, as of men who had penetrated into the lower dungeons of the prison and returned.

Sitting up in their bed and holding each other by the hand for comfort, the two women were afraid for what might have happened.

"Something untoward is on foot," said Memene. "Perhaps this is the night chosen by the red man from the sea" (for so she called Oleric) "to go forth as he did promise, although it is past the time he set for his going."

"Do you think that they have discovered the plan, and that he—Polaris—is taken again? I pray to God that is not so," whispered Rose.

"Something has greatly stirred the guards," Memene replied. "But I do not think that the mighty man of the wilderness and his red friend are taken. Those shouts we heard but now were those of disappointed men."

As the uproar continued through the rooms of the old prison, Rose and Memene arose and donned their garments. Sleep, for that night, had fled them.

Presently they heard, but faint and muffled through the intervening walls, the clatter of hoofs on the pavement of the black avenue as a horse passed by, ridden at furious speed.

A little later the door from the corridor outside the hall of audience was opened, and through it came that captain of the palace guard who was named Brunar. From Oleric, the captain had learned a few words of the English tongue, and he now made shift with them to tell the two fair prisoners that Polaris and Oleric, and likewise the captain, Mordo, had gone. The escape of Zenas Wright and Everson had not been discovered as yet. Two dead guards in the rooms of Mordo, and the absence of the marizel from its moorings in the hidden canal near the Temple of the Sun, accounted for part of the story. A rider on the fleetest horse in the stables of Bel-Ar, said Brunar, had been sent to the harbor to warn the guards there, so they might trap the fugitives.

From the manner in which his news was received, the captain was able to guess that Rose and Memene knew something of what was on foot. But this Brunar was a very courteous man, and he forbore to question them closely, if indeed he had enough English to do so. In the morning he came again, and told them of the fight at the harbor and the sailing of the marizel; for Brunar now took up his abode in the palace of Bel-Tisam and looked after the duties of Mordo. His two wards found him a kindly jailer, and as indulgent as circumstances would permit him to be, who could not set them free. Brunar was angry indeed at the supposed treachery of Oleric and of Mordo, not knowing that the one was a spy of Ruthar and that the other had had no will in the manner of his going forth from Adlaz.

Report was made later in the day of the

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escape of Everson from the mines, and of Zenas Wright from the household of the king, and men marveled at the daring of the deed and the craft of it. But the two women in their prison, or Ensign Brooks in the mines, or Minos at the harbor, got no more news of the fugitives for many a long day.

WITH Urk, the sailor, squatting among the levers of his engine, the marizel of Oleric swam steadily and swiftly down the western coast of Maeronica. Under water she went, well off from the shore and showing no lights. Oleric showed his passengers the marvelous valves in the sides of the little vessel which were similar in construction to the mask with which they already were familiar, and by means of which the air in the marizel was replenished with oxygen drawn from the sea water.

Also, he told them somewhat of the land to which they were journeying, explaining why it was that Ruthar, though smaller and more sparsely populated by far than Maeronica, had never been conquered by the larger power. It was a land of forests and mountains, he said, and all the way around its ragged coast-line were huge, precipitous cliffs, the overhanging crags of which were a natural barrier to invasion. Wherever had been a break in the cliff-line, the Rutharians, by dint of great labors, had filled the breaks with walls, closing the gaps so that the only places where one might land on Ruthar from the sea were certain spots where narrow stretches of beach lay at the foot of the towering cliffs.

At only one point could one come at the interior of the country from the sea, Oleric said, and that was at the mouth of a river named Illia. That place was closely guarded, and nature and the hand of man had united to make of it a way where one man might defy a thousand.

Years before, the red captain said, the Rutharians had had a few small ships. But they had little use for them, and with the perfection of the fademes by the Maeronicans, nearly a century before, the Rutharian vessels had been promptly sent to the bottom. Metals were easily mined, and in abundance, especially gold, in Maeronica. But the materials which produced the power for the fademes and for their terrible destroyers were scarce and precious. Therefore, the growth of the navy of Adlaz had been slow.

But with the fulfillment of the mighty destiny of the Children of Ad in mind, the scientists labored unceasingly, and it was in the mind of Bel-Ar that he was to be the man to see the accomplishment of that destiny. He waited but the equipment of a few more fademes to send his dreadful messengers forth to take and hold all the seas on earth, compelling the nations of the world to bow to the power of Adlaz, as tradition told him they once had bowed before.

"Now Ruthar, if her stars shine brightly, shall put a big stone before his chariot-wheels and break his power," Oleric said, "repaying evil with evil until good come of it, and the Goddess Glorian reigns from the capes at the north to the southern seas. And in that I pray that my part shall not be small." With a laugh he added, "This is a strange game for me to play—Oleric the Red, loose-mouthed soldier and slayer of men—who in Ruthar am known as Oleric the learned, a professor in the University of Nematzin, which is hard by the hill of Flomos, on the banks of the river Illia."

"And this Goddess Glorian—" asked Zenas Wright curiously. "Is she a statue in a temple, or the good star of Ruthar, or is she merely a name?"

For once the readiness in answer of the red captain deserted him, and he stared at the geologist with open mouth. Then he said soberly:

"No statue in a temple is the Goddess Glorian. Good star of Ruthar she is surely, and, in addition, she is the fairest woman on whom Shamar ever had looked down from the skies. And now her time comes on, for which she has waited many a hun—"

Oleric broke off suddenly and turned his eyes on Polaris with a strange look.

"Nay," he said; "for the rest you must learn from the goddess herself. My tongue does clack like a shepherd-wife's." Nor would he then or thereafter tell more of Ruthar and its goddess.

Zenas Wright mused to himself, and the train of his musings ran thus: "Oleric, you seem to keep your promises, and you are a good fighter, for I have seen you fight. But when it comes to your tales of living mammoths in this twentieth century, and of a goddess in the shape of a woman who has *waited many a hundred years*—for that was what you almost said, my friend—why, then, I can't follow you; and I think you like to draw the long bow."

Swiftly as the marizel traveled, that night wore into dawn, and day and dark-

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ness came, and still another dawning, ere Urk turned off his power and filled the air-chambers which raised the vessel to the surface of the sea. They had rounded the southern coast of Ruthar and beat up along the eastern shores, and here, as they arose from the depths, straight ahead of them lay the mouth of the river Illia. When the voyagers saw it, they did not wonder that Adlaz found little fortune in attacking Ruthar by sea.

An irregular fissure in the frowning face of the cliff discharged the river into the sea. That rift was nearly thirty yards wide at its bottom, and narrowed almost to nothingness far above, where the red granite of the headlands towered many hundreds of feet in height. Down the glen in the fissure the river Illia tripped to the sea like a lady down a stately stairway. For the rock of the river-bed was shelving, in strata which varied from less than a foot to nearly three feet in height, and some of the shelves were as much as ten yards in breadth; so that the water came down that great natural stair in a series of broad cascades.

"Up yonder stairway lies the path into Ruthar," Oleric said, pointing, as they stood on the deck of the marizel, and Urk laid the vessel as near to the shelving bank below the river-mouth as he could. "Here we must leave the marizel, and to the kindness of the waves; for there is no harbor in which to store her."

Oleric clambered from the deck and stood up to his knees on the lowermost step of the Illia's wide stairway. The others followed, Urk last of all, haling before him the captain, Mordo, with his hands bound.

For Mordo had proved an unruly passenger. When the fumes of the wine cleared from his brain, which was not for many hours, he had so cursed and raged at Oleric, forswearing all friendship that had been between them, that the Rutharian had lost his temper. He told Mordo roundly that he wished that he had left him to the mercy of Bel-Ar and the priests of Shamar.

"Better that than the company of a traitorous hound," growled Mordo out of a soul in which no gratitude dwelt. Oleric deemed that it was best to bind him, lest he do mischief.

Ascent of the river-stair was not difficult at first, for the steps were broad, and at that season of the year the volume of water coming down them was not so strong but that a man might keep his footing if he used care.

Hardly were the climbers well within the shadow of the glen when there arose from the foot of the stair a mighty shouting and splashing. Oleric spun round with a curse on his lips.

QUICKLY as they had come from Adlaz town, their destination had been guessed, and others had come almost as quickly. As the fugitives turned, they saw a Maeronican fademe swing alongside the lowermost step of the ascent, her fore and after decks crowded with men, who swarmed off her onto the rock and ran up the stairway. Foremost among them, gorgeous in his golden armor, was the Captain Daelo, and he matched the curse of Oleric with another as he shook his gauntleted fist at his enemy.

"Haste! Haste!" Oleric cried, then pursed his lips and sent a long whistle skirling up the glen. As he did so he lost his footing, clawed wildly at the air and the rocks, and went down.

Though the push of the down-rushing waters of the Illia was not strong enough to sweep a man from his feet if he were cautious, it was yet of sufficient power to keep him going once he fell. From shelf to shelf down the great stairway Oleric went, his armor clanging. More than that, he swept Mordo and the sturdy Urk from their footing, also; and all three of them slid straight into the hands of Daelo's men, outstretched to receive them.

As the soldiers seized Oleric and stood him upright, he wrenched free one arm and waved it at his companion.

"Tarry not for me!" he shouted. "Go on! There be friends waiting at the top—" A soldier smote him on the mouth and silenced him.

On the step where he stood Polaris halted. He bent, and with his strong fingers snapped the strings of his shoes and removed them—for he still wore his own clothing in which he had been dragged from the sea. With his feet bared, he had a better grip on the slippery rock. He snatched the sword of Everson from its sheath and went down the river-path, all unarmored as he was, to meet the swordsmen of Daelo. On they clambered, cursing and shouting; but the way was difficult for their mailed feet, and the son of the snows leaped down at them like an avalanche. With him, breast-deep in the current, went Rombar.

First man to meet the descending danger was Daelo, and he paid the penalty of his temerity with his life. Polaris, striking from above, smote him from his foothold,

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a blow that shore away half of his golden helm and split the skull within it, and the Captain Daelo pitched backward into the sea.

Another bound and a stroke so bitter that it hewed off the arm of a steel-clad soldier, severing it between wrist and elbow, and the son of the snows had freed Oleric from the hands that held him. Straightway the red captain drew sword and took up the tale. Daelo's men, of whom there were nearly a score, faltered, staggering and slipping on the rocky shelves. Almost their courage was broken, when Polaris caught his naked foot in a crevice in the rock and tripped. Before he could recover, a heavy sword-blade fell upon his unprotected head from behind. He let fall his own blade and sank to his knees and then to his face on the steps of Illia.

Short-lived was the triumph of the Maeronicans. The cry of exultation which greeted the fall of their dreaded enemy was turned into a howl of dismay as half a hundred fierce-eyed fighting men of Ruthar poured down the glen, waving their bared swords and shouting:

"For the Goddess Glorian! Slay the Maeronican dogs!"

That tide overwhelmed the company of Daelo to the last man, and with them died black Mordo. Less by one more fademe was the navy of King Bel-Ar.

When the warriors of the forests turned up the stair once more, they found Oleric kneeling in the water, supporting Polaris's head on his arm, while old Zenas and Everson bound with strips torn from their clothing the gaping wound which the sword-blade had left at the back of his head. Beside the group, Rombar, standing nearly to his neck in the wash of the river, lifted up his head and howled dolefully.

Six strong men took up the limp form of the fair-haired giant and bore it away up the river staircase.

So Polaris came at last to Ruthar.

UP THE rocky shelves of Illia the Rutharians trudged and splashed, the chasm becoming ever narrower and more gloomy. With the narrowing of the rift, the water became deeper and its current stronger. Then one of the party uncoiled a long rope from his shoulder, and the party marched on in single file, each clinging to the rope like Alpine climbers.

Oleric urged haste and more haste.

Presently the water was too deep for Rombar, and the current set so strongly that the dog could not swim against it. At an order from Oleric, two Rutharian hunters seized the brute by the collar, and though one of them got a gashed hand for his pains, they bound Rombar's jaws and feet with ropes and carried him on their shoulders—a task which neither they nor Rombar found pleasant.

At a point in the ascent where further progress against the deepening stream was impossible, the party left the bed of the river and clambered to the right, where a flight of steep and narrow steps had been cut in the rock along a fissure which branched from the main gorge. Up nearly two hundred of those steps they toiled, until Zenas Wright and Everson, unused to such exertions, nearly fainted with exhaustion. At the top of the stairs they emerged into a forest of tall trees, oak and pine and chestnut, which grew almost to the edge of the cliffs.

No sooner had he stepped from the rock stairway than Oleric knelt and kissed the black earth.

"This, my friends, is Ruthar," he said as he arose and faced the two Americans.

From among the trees came a tall, white-bearded chieftain, who was armored from head to heel in a wonderful suit of chain mail, links of steel that shone like silver. At his back swung a two-handed sword which was nearly the length of a man.

He advanced to Oleric and laid his hands on the captain's shoulders.

"You are Oleric the Red, and no other," he said. "Well do I remember you. Once I was your pupil. But that was more than three times ten years ago." He shook his head wonderingly. "You serve Ruthar well," he added.

Now, had Zenas Wright been able to understand the speech of Ruthar, he certainly would have set this chieftain down as a hoary-headed liar. For how could he have been a pupil to Oleric the Red more than thirty years before, when it was plain for any one to see that the captain must at that time have been a babe in his mother's arms?

"Aye, Jastla, it is the old red fox come back to his hole again," Oleric answered, striking the old chief fondly across his broad shoulders.

"Which of these with you is the man—the hope of Ruthar?" questioned Jastla. His eyes passed the stubby form of Zenas Wright by and rested inquiringly on the square and soldierly Everson.

Oleric's ruddy face went sober. His voice choked as he answered:

"Nay, Jastla, neither of these. He comes

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yonder—and I fear that he is sorely smitten."

As he spoke the six Rutharians who bore Polaris Janess came over the brink of the stair and laid their burden down.

Jastla strode to the side of Polaris and looked down at him.

"A mighty man, with golden hair—and comely, as was written in the prophecy," he muttered into his beard. "What has befallen him?" he asked of Oleric.

While the captain told of the fight at the river-mouth, Zenas Wright knelt at Polaris's head and rearranged the bandages, which had become loosened in the rough journey through the gorge. Rombar, who had been that moment untrussed, pushed growling through the group of men and crouched and licked at his master's face.

"Will he live, Father Zenas? Will he live?" Oleric asked. "Tell us, you, who are skilled."

"God knows," groaned Zenas. The hand which he laid on the steel cheek of Polaris shook so that he snatched it away and hid it. "God only knows. There is a little life in him yet."

"He plucked me from the sea," said Oleric wildly. "That was fated of the gods. Twice has he fought at my side. This day perchance he has given his life for me; and that was of his own strong spirit. I tell you, Father Zenas, that if it would do my brother any good, here would Oleric fall upon his sword and render up his soul unto those that sent it forth." Then he controlled himself. "Can he be moved? Can you keep the vital spark within him for a little space, good father? We must haste and get him to the Goddess Glorian. If his soul be not sped when he reaches her, she can hold it back, if any on earth can. Say, Father Zenas, can you do it?"

"I will try," answered Zenas. "If I had a little wine, now—"

"Wine!" Oleric shouted. "Bring wine, some one of you, and haste, though your lungs burst. And slay a kid, so that we may have broth."

A fleet-footed Rutharian lad set off through the forest, running with the speed of a deer.

"Now, Jastla, see you to a horse-litter. Two gentle beasts, mind you, but speedy. For we must travel fast and far. I take my brother to the Hill of Flomos. And send on a swift messenger to the Goddess Glorian, to tell her that the hope of Ruthar lies wounded in the forests and is near to death. Haste, Jastla; haste!"

Wine was brought, and it was good wine; for the grapes that grow in the valleys of Ruthar are the finest in all the world. Zenas Wright forced apart the set jaws of the stricken man, using a sword-point to do it, and even as Dr. Marsey, who was dead, had done for Oleric, poured the purple wine and a little broth into Polaris's mouth. The kindly old geologist could only pray that some of it penetrated to the man's stomach, for most of it was spilled out again when they moved him.

CHIEF Jastla brought a horse-litter. In it, between two powerful beasts, Polaris was slung. The Rutharians wrapped him closely with blankets and furs. The sun had turned to his northward journey, and in the forests of Ruthar the air was keen with the tang of approaching winter—felt there in the uplands long before it reached to the plains and valleys of Maeronica.

Horses were fetched for Oleric, Wright and Everson, and they set off at once along the mountain trails skirting the mighty cañon of the Illia. An escort of half a score of Rutharian hunters rode with them.

All that day and night and until sunset of the next day they rode with only brief stops at small Rutharian hamlets, where they ate hurriedly and changed horses. Word had been sent on before of their coming, and fresh horses were always in waiting. Sleep they did not, save in their saddles, and the two Americans felt that they might die from sheer weariness.

Oleric did not sleep at all, though of all the party his vitality seemed the least impaired by that racking journey. His face grew haggard and gaunt, and his eyes red-rimmed, but a wonderful determination seemed to sustain his body. He spoke seldom, and then to urge his faltering companions to renewed efforts.

Rombar ran with the horses until he was utterly done up. Then Oleric left the dog at one of the mountain villages, to be brought on later.

In the morning of the second day the party swung to the right, away from the gorge of the Illia, to come to it again about noon and cross it on a bridge of steel and stone that spanned it three hundred feet up from the torrent's course.

Everson, looking at those piles and trusses, judged the building of that bridge to be the feat of no mean engineer. Though there had been a waste of material, the structure would have stood comparison with many a bridge in Europe or America.

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Throughout the long ride, Polaris lay like a log in the litter. Occasionally, at the stopping places, the scientist redressed the wound, smearing it with a healing balsam which an old woman in one of the villages had given him. It was a fearsome gash, and Zenas shook his head over it whenever he saw it. The point of the sword had laid open the scalp at the back of Polaris's head for a matter of inches, then had glanced from the bone beneath and bitten deeply into the neck near the spinal column.

Wright sheared the hair away from the wound and stitched it as neatly as he could. Despite his care the edges of the cut turned blue, as is the way with such hurts if they have not expert attention. In the afternoon of that second day's ride he found that Polaris's hands and feet were becoming cold, and that the geologist deemed the worst sign of all.

Shortly after they had crossed the bridge the contour of the country became less wild. They emerged from among the crags and peaks of the mountains into the foothills, where the forests were not so dense as above, and from time to time they came upon large spaces of cleared lands with tilled fields and many vineyards.

In one of the forest glades the party passed a spot where a number of fair-sized trees had been uprooted and partly stripped of their branches and bark. Others, still standing, were mere distorted stubs of trees, their trunks scored and twisted and their foliage gone.

"I hope such storms as the one that did this damage are not frequent hereabouts," said Zenas, pointing out the wrecks to Everson.

Oleric heard the remark.

"'Storms,' say you, Father Zenas?" he said. "The storm that went through here walked on four feet. When we of Ruthar see such a sight in the forest, we know that an amaloc has breakfasted there. I forget the high-sounding name you call him by."

"That lad should have been a writer of fiction," said Zenas to himself when the captain had ridden on. "He almost makes me believe in him."

"Gorry-me," Zenas groaned, easing himself in his saddle, "I wish we were at the end of this ride, wherever it is. I do not think that I shall ever be able to walk again. You," he said to Everson, "you ride along there in your golden armor like—what is it?—a paladin of old, and never a word out of you. Well, I'd sooner stand it, at that, than to go back to that roasting-spit I was put to tend in the king's kitchen." Zenas grunted as recollection stung him.

"Why, do you know, one day I was figuring out a bit of calculus in my head, just for practise, and I let the meat scorch; and the head cook actually laid a dog-whip across my back. Yes, sir; me, a fellow in the National Geographic Society, whipped across a kitchen by a greasy-faced dough-slinger who doesn't know gneiss from rotten-stone!"

Wright grunted again at the memory of that indignity, and then rambled on:

"But we've got to stand it all for the boy here, and for the folks we left behind. God knows I'm willing to for their sakes, and worse yet, if it's to come. But I must grumble once in a while, and I can't help it. Say, Everson, do you believe any of that chaff of our red-headed friend about the mammoths?"

The lieutenant did not answer, and Wright, peering into his face, saw that he was asleep in the saddle.

Well down upon his course was the sun, and the shadows of the trees were lengthening eastward, when the travelers, who for some time had been following a smooth, straight road through rolling hills, came to an old Rutharian villa, which stood among its gardens a considerable distance back from the highway. A low wall bordered the grounds at the front along the roadway, a wall with a pillared gateway, where a drive led in from the road. At the foot of each of the pillars, sitting his horse like a statue, was a Rutharian gentleman.

AS THE weary cavalcade came down the road the two riders left their posts and advanced to meet it, parleying with Oleric. Scarcely half a dozen words passed back and forth when the red captain set up a joyful shout. When he reached the gateway he turned his horse in, bidding the others to follow.

"Here's hoping that some one will introduce me to a bed before I clean forget what one feels like," said Zenas.

At the side of the ancient house the riders dismounted, Everson reeling from his horse like a drunken man and throwing himself face downward on the grass.

Oleric superintended the removal of Polaris from the litter.

The geologist was bending over his charge as the hunters bore him along when he became aware of the tall figure

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of a woman that came down from the porch of the mansion and hastened along the walk. She had throw a long, dark red cloak about her shoulders. In the dusk of the garden the scientist could not distinguish her features, but he saw that her hair was dark, or seemed to be, and that she was taller than most women and splendidly formed.

"The Goddess Glorian!" Oleric cried aloud. "Oh, by the stars of Ruthar, but you are welcome!"

Down on one knee sank the captain and kissed her hand.

"Oh, goddess, after all these years I have brought you the hope of Ruthar. But he is sorely wounded—dying—and you alone can save him. We were bringing him to Flomos with all the speed we might, and thought not to find you here."

"Where else should Glorian be, but on the way to meet this man?" she answered simply. "Jastla's messenger reached Flomos this morning. He rode four horses to their deaths upon his way. You have done well, Oleric the Learned."

When he heard the silvery cadences of that voice, though he understood not a word save the name of the captain, a thrill passed through Zenas Wright, old as he was, and through his aged veins he felt the blood course faster. The woman came nearer. He smelled the warm perfume of her hair as she bent and touched the cheek of Polaris with her hand.

"Bring him within, Oleric," she said, "and, oh, haste, for—" Her glorious voice broke. "For he is nearly gone."

Swinging the still form of Polaris shoulder high, the Rutharian hunters passed on and into the mansion, leaving Zenas behind.

"Now, what do you know about that?" gasped the scientist as he sank wearily to the ground beside Everson. "Goddess, indeed! What, I want to know, will Rose Emer say when she learns of this young person? Well, I hope she saves the lad; but she'll need to be a doctor of parts, or I'm a donkey. Poor boy! Poor boy!"

In a few moments came Oleric to show Wright and Everson to their quarters for the night in the rear of the house. And a rare time he had to arouse the lieutenant sufficiently to lead him to bed.

White and still, Polaris Janess lay on a bed in an upper chamber of the old house. By the light from a mitzl globe—trophy of some Rutharian chieftain in a foray over the Kimbrian Wall—the Goddess Glorian bent above him and studied his pale features.

"My friend, my poor friend," she said brokenly. "How often through the weary years I have seen you in my dreams—and now to find you—only to lose you."

Hot tears ran down her cheeks and fell on the stricken man's face.

"Oh! It shall not be!" she said fiercely. "You shall not die—not if Glorian must give her soul to hold you back from the gates of darkness."

Throwing aside her cloak, she drew a chair to the bedside. With her fingers she lifted Polaris's eyelids and held them open. She gazed deep into the tawny eyes, now, alas, so dull and lifeless. For hours she sat there, with no more apparent movement than the man she watched over. The whole strength of her being seemed concentrated in some inward, unyielding struggle.

And as the long hours passed a change came over the sick man. He did not stir. He scarcely seemed to breathe. But his face became less gray and haggard, and the icy chill of death was driven from his hands and feet.

Long after midnight it was when the Goddess Glorian stood up from that bed-

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side and in her heart said wildly, "I have won!"

Summing her women, who waited without the door, she bade them dress anew the now festering wound and pour a little wine and broth into his throat.

All night long the Goddess Glorian sat and watched him.

In the morning, when Oleric came to the door in answer to her summons, she looked up at him with a wan smile.

"Fear no longer," she said. "The man will live."

ON THE third day after his arrival at the old Rutharian mansion, Polaris left it. But he knew nothing of that going. He still lay in the heavy stupor which was to hold him thrall for many days. Zenas Wright doubted much the wisdom of moving a man so ill. The scientist himself, after two days' rest, felt scarcely equal to the journey, and the thought of again bestriding a horse made him shudder. Still, he reasoned that it was by a miracle that Janess lived at all, and if she who had wrought that miracle, the Goddess Glorian, said he might be moved in safety, why, doubtless she knew what she was about.

A low, four-wheeled car was brought. Across the box of it the hunters lashed light and springy poles and on them piled robes and blankets, making a soft and easy bed for the sick man. At the head of that couch rode the Goddess Glorian, cloaked and hooded, and at its foot crouched black Rombar, who had been brought in from the village where he had been left, and who seemed little the worse for his long jaunt. Wright and the lieutenant occupied another smaller car in the rear, and in a third vehicle rode a number of the women of Glorian's household. Oleric, mounted and aglitter in chain armor of steel—for he had discarded as soon as might be the hated golden livery of Bel-Ar—rode at the side of the first car. For escort the party had the company of nearly a score of young Rutharian zinds—zind was the only title of nobility in Ruthar.

So they set out for Flomos, traveling by easy stages and with many rests. The roads were smooth and the country more even than that they had left behind. All along the way, be the time of day what it might, they rode between two long lines of people—people silent for the most part, who stood with bowed heads as the cars and the riders passed by.

Far and wide throughout the land had gone the word that the man who had come to be known as the hope of Ruthar was journeying to Flomos, and the circumstances of that journey. These who lined the road were gathered there to do him silent homage. Satisfied were they if they only caught a fleeting glimpse of his still face on its pillow of furs. Over all of Ruthar went up a many-voiced and ceaseless prayer for his welfare.

"H'm, Everson, folks will never stand like that for us, living or dead," said Zenas Wright to the lieutenant, when Oleric had told them the meaning of the silent lines of people. Despite his banter, the old geologist was deeply touched.

Two days and part of a third they traveled—for they did not hurry—stopping for the nights at the homes of Rutharian gentlemen along the road. It was nearly afternoon of the third day when they followed the winding of the highway around the last low hills of the mountain range and came out upon a plateau-plain of wide extent, in the center of which was a wooded eminence, and on its crest the white pillars of a temple shone in the sunlight.

The road stretched straight across the plain through a broad expanse of tilled lands and gardens, which ringed a city that stood at the foot of the hill. It was scarcely a fifth the proportions of Adlaz, this ancient town of Ruthar, which was called Zele-omaz, or City by the River; but it was a pretty place of broad streets shaded by many trees, gardens and low-built, pleasant homes, with here and there the statelier dwellings of some zind or wealthy man.

Here, too, was the Illia, rock-bound no longer, but a fair and gentle stream, winding through the town and spanned by many bridges.

Skirting the city at the right, the travelers followed a sloping path that led up the hill to where the temple stood.

"Yonder," Oleric said, pointing down to where a group of low buildings of gray stone rambled at the waterside under spreading yew trees, "is the University of Nematzin, of which I am a professor. And there is the laboratory of which I spoke, where we shall make the thunder-dust to shake down the Kimbrian Wall."

"One more day's rest, and I will be fit for anything," answered Everson.

"What do you teach in this university, friend?" Zenas queried.

"A little of the science of the stars, Fa-

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ther Zenas—or I did, for it is many years since I have sat among my pupils—somewhat of history and of language," replied the red captain.

"Humph; you must have been a young teacher," said Zenas Wright, and he ran his fingers through the sprouting stubble of his beard, as he had a habit of doing when things vexed him. Suddenly he jumped in his seat, though the wrench to his sore flesh cost him a wry face.

"Hey! Everson! Look at that, and then tell me if I'm dreaming."

The "that" was a gateway through which the car was about to pass. Oleric followed with a glance the direction in which the geologist pointed and then rode on with a smile.

It was a very curious gate, so curious that, if it still stands, and it doubtless does, for it was built to endure, there is none other just like it in the world. At each side of the roadway was a section of black stone wall, extending along the path a matter of a dozen feet and some ten feet high. At intervals along the tops of the two walls were set round, squat pillars, also of stone. Those had been hollowed out and served as bases for enormous ivory tusks, which were embedded in cement in the hollowed pillars, and from them curved up to meet over the center of the roadway, where their tips were made fast with double sockets of bronze.

Ivory the tusks were; there was no doubting that; weather-checked and stained yellow by age and the elements, but still ivory. But the size of them! No elephant that ever walked the earth bore ivories of such proportions. For they were as large around at their bases as the chest of an average man; and from base to tapering tip there was none of them that did not measure eleven feet. Seven pair of them there were, and all splendidly matched.

ZENAS stared back at that marvelous arch—for it was more an archway than a gate—as hard as he could stare. Not until a turn of the road hid it, did he relax into his seat.

"Maybe he isn't so great a liar, after all," he said, and he meant Oleric. "Everson, those are mammoth's tusks—sure's I'm a sinner."

"Strange land, strange things," answered Everson laconically.

The home or temple of the Goddess Glorian on the hill of Flomos was a small thing by comparison with the mighty Temple of Shamar, but in its way was quite as beautiful. Like the temple of the sun-god, the house of Glorian was built all of white marble. Fronting north toward the city of Zele-omaz was a façade of four-and-twenty sixty-foot pillars. A broad, paved porch, reached by half a hundred steps, lay at the foot of the façade. Back of the pillars were twelve double doors of bronze, leading into a lofty hall, the marble dome of which towered high above the pillars and could be seen from the countryside for miles about when the sun shone on it.

Back of the hall the structure was divided into three floors, or stories, each of many roomy chambers and corridors. The whole was well lighted by windows of clear glass, of which an abundance was used in both Maeronica and Ruthar. Behind the temple, southward down the hill, were the dwellings of Glorian's personal retainers and servants.

Well back from the center of the domed hall and near the foot of a grand staircase which led to the second floor, was a raised dais of marble, whereon Glorian was wont to sit and give judgment in matters of state which were too high for the administration of the zinds who ruled in the different cities and provinces. Once Ruthar had had its dynasty of kings, but that was many years before. The royal line died out, and because of certain circumstances at that time the people raised up no more kings. At the time of the coming of the strangers the Goddess Glorian was the absolute power in Ruthar.

On the dais in the throne-room was another wonder for Zenas Wright to see. It was a massive, double-seated chair, constructed, even to the pegs which held its parts together, of ivory like in the giant tusks of the arch. An artist of surpassing skill had wrought that chair and had carved it into the semblance of tall lily-stalks with heavy-headed, drooping blossoms and slender fronds. All around the larger stalks were cut the clinging tendrils of a creeping vine, a tracery as fine as lace.

* * *

Wright and Everson were given rooms on the second floor of the temple at its western side. Polaris was borne to a chamber on the upper story, where he was tended by Glorian herself and the servants of her household. Rombar took

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up his quarters in that chamber also, and only Oleric could lure the dog forth from his master's side, and then not for long at a time.

Soon after their arrival at the hill of Flomos, and when they had rested some of the stiffness from their joints, Everson and the scientist went down with Oleric to the laboratories of Nematzin to begin their work. Though the students of Ruthar were not unskilled in chemistry of a sort, they knew nothing of explosives. So Zenas prepared himself for a series of tests to discover the materials of which he was in need, or, if he could not find what he desired, some combination which would serve.

In that constructive analysis the naval lieutenant could be of little aid. Oleric then found a task for him which was more to his liking. It was the drilling of men.

From her center to her rock-bound coasts, Ruthar hummed with the preparation for war.

"If we are to fight, let us first know how many men we can raise, and how they will be disposed," said Everson. "What is the population of this country, and how will it match up, man for man, with Maeronica?"

All told, Ruthar's people numbered something like a million and a quarter, Oleric informed him; and in Maeronica the population was near to three and one-half millions, at least a half a million of which dwelt in the great city of Adlaz.

"As it is figured in the world, your army then will be made up of one fighting man to every ten persons," the lieutenant said. "If the spirit of the people is with us, we should be able to put at least one hundred and twenty-five thousand men in the field—and Bel-Ar, three hundred and fifty thousand. Those are heavy odds."

"Ruthar shall do better even than that," Oleric said with pride. "I promise you that two hundred thousand men shall march when they hear the war-drums—and more may be found if the need grows bitter."

"Can you equip and maintain them?" Everson asked.

"In Ruthar every man is a soldier. They will equip themselves. This day has been awaited for long. Ruthar is ready to give all for the uses of her warrior sons. Fear not. Besides, though I will not deny that the men of Ad are good fighters and their country is far the richer, yet many of them are fat city dwellers and traders, of whom two are not a match for one of the hardy men of the mountains who will march under the banners of the Goddess Glorian. Show them the ruins of the Kimbrian Wall, and were the armies of Ad twice their strength, yet they should not turn Ruthar from her purpose."

Everson nodded thoughfully. "How will this force be divided?" he asked. "Have you many horsemen? In such a war as this promises to be, cavalry will be invaluable."

The red captain knit his brow in calculation.

"Forty thousand wild horsemen of the hills and mountains, who know not fear, can I promise," he said at length. "Five thousand chariots we can muster, each of two horses, and carrying each two fighting men and a driver to guide the horses; twenty thousand skilled archers; ninety thousand heavily armed men with swords and spears; ten thousand slingers; and twenty thousand men armed with javelins—these last to serve as skirmishers."

Everson's eyes kindled at the recital of that tale of men, and he smiled—one of the few smiles that had lightened his face since his ship had been lost.

"We must gather them into camps at once," he said. "The time is all too short in which to make an enemy out of raw levies. We must drill them all winter, and that will be a man's job."

Straightway he threw himself into the task with tireless energy. And he vowed to himself that the men who had dared to sink a United States cruiser should learn a lesson of tears and death, and that he would have a hand in the teaching of the lesson.

OBLIVION, like a deep and dreamless sleep, was the portion of Polaris Janess. It seemed that his soul had withdrawn itself to some place of peace to wait until its racked and weary body should once more be fit for tenancy. The wound in his neck closed and healed. Somewhat of color crept back into his cheeks. His body began to thrive, but there was in it seemingly little more of sentient life than in a tree which draws its nourishment from the soil and knows not of days and nights and the cares thereof.

"It is a blood-clot that presses somewhere on the brain," Glorian told his friends, who stood often at his quiet

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bedside. "'Twill pass away ere long, and he will be whole again."

To the surprise of Zenas and Everson, Glorian and a number of the learned men of the college of Nematzin spoke English almost with the facility of Oleric, from whom, indeed, they had learned it. And this was a great source of delight to the old geologist, who liked to talk and grumble over his labors. And what use is there in grumbling, if there is no one to hear and understand?

Came a day when the curtain lifted from the brain of the sick man, and memory peopled the vacant stage, as once before it had done when he lay ill in the cabin on the ship *Felix* on his first journey from his home in the wilderness.

Wondering, he lay still with closed lids, as he had a trick of doing when he

The Kimbrian Wall was down—and beyond lay their goal for the winning. . . .

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waked from slumber. He began to reconstruct. The wreck of the *Minnetonka* passed before him, and then, like a series of pictures, the events which had followed the sinking of the ship; the stranger people; the judgment of the king; the parting from his love; the coming of the red captain in the night and the flight from Adlaz; the fight at the wharves and the farewell of Minos; the great stairway of the Illia—

There the pictures ceased. He could not then, or ever afterward, recall the fight in the river, where he had gone down to aid Oleric and come by his wound.

Into his nostrils was wafted a breath of faint perfume. A cool hand was laid against his cheek. He opened his eyes. The details of a high, arched room he saw; windows of glass at the north, where the sun shone thinly and big flakes of snow were floating slowly down—for winter had come to Ruthar; at his cheek a long, wonderfully shaped, white hand, with tapering, ringless fingers; a slender wrist; beyond it a face. He closed his lids again, with a frown of disbelief. The beauty of that face was such as no mortal ever saw, save in a dream.

The hand stirred, and he looked again. From the times of Helen of Troy on down through the pages of all recorded history, those pages have been made bright by the faces of fair women who were their nations' boast. Here, before the eyes of the sick man, was a face that was the peer of any that ever shone in fable or in fact. A broad, high forehead above two dark and well-defined arches; beneath them, delicately veined lids and long dark lashes, veiling red-brown eyes. Eyes so wonderfully alive with expression that their change was like the bewildering melting of colors in a sunset; between their marvelous valleys, a slenderly bridged nose with a hint of the Roman. A rich, full-lipped mouth that was the playground of smiles, but which showed also the quality of rare determination, a promise sustained by the firmly rounded chin beneath it, a skin so fine of texture that through it might be traced the ebb and flow of life, as flames show roseate through a marble vase.

Her head had the poise of an empress, and at its shapely crown, piled high, were lustrous coils of hair which at first glance seemed black; but when the light struck on it, glowed as an ember glows when a breath renews its dullness into fire.

Such was the beauty of the woman on whom Polaris looked—and as he gazed, acknowledgment was forced within him that here was one that surpassed in fairness even the Rose Maid whom he loved. And there was no disloyalty in that acknowledgment. Rose Emer was a beautiful woman; but she who sat before him, and who seemed of nearly the same age and whose figure much resembled that of his own dear lady, she had the beauty of unearthly things.

For a moment he stared in silence.

"Where am I, and who are you?" he asked, and smiled faintly in response to her little exclamation of delight that his senses had come back to him. Before she could speak, he muttered, "I had forgotten; she will not understand."

"But I do understand, my poor friend," she said, "and can make answer in your own tongue—if we keep to simple talk."

As the quality of that voice had thrilled old Zenas, so now it sent a tremor through the veins of the son of the snows.

"You are in the city of Zele-omaz, and I, who have watched while you lay wounded and ill, am a poor lady of wild Ruthar," she continued.

"'Poor' and 'wild' are words that ill beseem you, lady," replied Polaris in the quaint expression that in the long years when his father had been his sole companion, he had absorbed from the pages of Scott's romantic "Ivanhoe," and which contact with modern English had not worn away.

"I think that one Oleric has spoken oft of you, and that I can guess the name you bear—and I find it a most fitting name."

Rose-pink the Goddess Glorian flushed, in a most mortal fashion, and was glad that at that moment black Rombar thrust his head forward over the edge of the bed to claim a share in the attention of his master.

Polaris stirred his hands, and then looked up wonderingly.

"I am weak," he said. "How long have I lain ill, and what misfortune befell me to so lay me by the heels? I understand it not at all; for my memory has tricked me."

Toying with Rombar's collar, Glorian told him what she had learned from the others of the fight at the mouth of the Illia.

"And I do thank you for the life of my faithful captain," she said, "as he will presently. It was a brave deed, a

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very brave deed. Now you must talk no more, and no more must I weary you. You are worn with sickness, and it will be many days before your strength comes back. Rest and fret not. All things are going well."

She left him, and presently he slept.

CHAPTER VI

ZOAR OF THE AMALOCS

BEYOND their knowledge of the working of metals, in which they had great facility, Zenas Wright soon found that the scientists of Nematzin could avail him little in his search for explosive compounds. Ordinary gunpowder, indeed, he knew he could make easily enough, after a fashion, but he sought for something more powerful by far than that. From the descriptions which he had heard of the Kimbrian Wall, he judged that it would be a rare task to shake it down.

"We might do it with nitroglycerin," he told Everson. "But we would have to set all of the old wives of Ruthar to soap-making to get our glycerin, and it would be a difficult job to get it pure enough to serve our turn. Besides, nitroglycerin is mean and uncertain to handle."

The two men sat before a ruddy coal fire in the big laboratory room which had been turned over to the uses of the geologist—a fire well screened from the rest of the room, so that no flying spark should raise mischief among the experiments of Zenas. Three weeks had elapsed since their arrival at Zele-omaz. Polaris Janess was well along the road to health. Everson and Oleric, laboring tirelessly, had established five great training camps, one on the plain near the city, and four others in the forests to the north beyond the Illia. Already the levies of Ruthar were pouring into the camps, where they were drilled by the zinds and captains, under the direction of the naval lieutenant and the red captain.

Everson had thrown his whole heart into the work. Already he had made considerable progress in the learning of the Rutharian language. He was beginning to take a vast pride in the army he was welding. Born soldiers he found these Rutharians, amenable to the strict discipline which he preached, and to whom his word was law.

He had ridden in this day from a tour of inspection of his camps to visit Wright and learn of the progress of the work on which depended their entire scheme of campaign.

"Nitroglycerin," said Everson. "So you have found a source of nitric acid, then?"

"Yes," replied Wright. "One of the first things which took my eye among a number of specimens of rock which I found in a case here, was a chunk of sodium nitrate. You know the stuff—Chile saltpeter, they call it."

"Why not a picrate powder, if you have nitrates to work with?" suggested the lieutenant.

"Picrate—nitric acid—phenol," said old Zenas. "That's the way of it. And to get phenol—lots of it—"

He broke off and stared into the depths of the fire.

"Hey!" he cried, and jumped to his feet so suddenly that Everson started. Zenas pointed at the fire, his little black eyes dancing and his beard wagging with his excitement.

"Well?" queried Everson.

"Coal, my boy, coal! There's oodles of it here. All I've got to do is to rig up a kiln for the distillation of coal-tar oil, and I'll have the phenol. God knows, these beggars are handy enough in the gentle art of blacksmithing. Tell your red-headed master of ceremonies to give me a little help—say two hundred or two hundred and fifty of his armorers, till I get a few kilns in operation and build me a bank of Glover towers, and I'll show you a line of stuff that will beat all of the Fourth of July celebrations you ever saw. Picrates! Humph! I'll turn out a brand of melinite for you that will jar the back door of hell off its hinges—if I don't whiff us all to kingdom come while I'm at the stuff."

Oleric was summoned. The red captain turned over to Zenas Wright not two hundred, but nearer five hundred men, and the old university was straightway turned into a munitions plant, the stench and the fires of which ascended to heaven by day and by night.

"And bring me about all the fat you can find in the kingdom," directed Zenas. "I'll need it to mix with my nice little patty-cakes."

"You shall have it, Father Zenas," Oleric replied. "And it will not come amiss to make all that you can of this pastry. After the Kimbrian Wall is down, we may find some of it useful at the gates of Adlaz."

So interested did Zenas become in this

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new work of his that he scarcely stopped for meals, and he slept on a cot of skins beside his fire in the old laboratory. One day, as he labored among his test-tubes, the outer door opened, and a tall figure robed in furs strode across the room and stood beside him. Zenas looked up impatiently.

"Oh, Lordy, laddie!" he cried, his face lighting up. "It's good to see you on your feet again."

It was Polaris—still somewhat gaunt and tottery, but with a welcome color in his cheeks and a brightness in his topaz eyes that augured well.

"Aye, old friend, 'tis I," he answered. "While you do wear yourself thin in this place of many smells, and Everson rides his flesh off his bones, shall I then be doing nothing but to lie in a soft bed and dream the days away? I will have no more of it."

FROM that day strength came back to the son of the snows with surprising rapidity, considering that he had been so ill. Nor would he chafe in restless idleness, but demanded work to do. Soon in the five great camps of fighting men his figure and that of the huge black dog which followed him like a shadow were as well known to the soldiers as were those of Everson and the lieutenant. Under the tutelage of the Goddess Glorian, he had advanced in mastery of the Rutharian tongue much faster than either of the other two Americans; for he was a natural linguist and did not find the ancient language difficult.

Old Jastla had come down out of his hills, and it was his particular pride to superintend the training of the son of the snows in the use of the arms of Ruthar. At his first trial, weakened though he was by his illness, Polaris cast a javelin farther by half a score of paces than could any warrior of Ruthar. Within a fortnight, although they might touch him by tricks of fence, there was not a swordsman in the five armies who could wear him down in the play of blades.

Jastla boasted of him throughout the land.

But though he took pleasure in all these things, he knew anxiety with the passing of the days, and in his heart pined mightily for news of his lady in Adlaz town. For that strong, true heart could not forget. Occasionally Oleric had word from over the wall from some of his secret spies in Maeronica, but never a word of the welfare of the stranger captives.

All of his story Polaris had one day told to Glorian. And she had smiled and cheered him with brave words. And then, when he had gone, she had sat for the half of a day in her chamber, looking out at the snow-capped hills of Ruthar, striving to remember that she was a goddess, and to forget that she also was a woman. Too late she found that the woman conquered.

Five weeks went by from the day when Polaris first went down to the workshop of Zenas. And then the geologist announced that he would give a show. He had some wares which he was anxious to display, he said.

Near the south bank of the Illia, above the city and beyond the camp, stood an old stone tower which long had been crumbling into decay and which Atra, the zind who ruled in Zele-omaz, had purposed some day to tear down. There it was that the geologist said he would stage his performance, and all the camp and a goodly part of the citizens of the town went thither to see what he would do.

At the appointed hour, early in the afternoon, the scientist rode out to the tower, attended by three of his assistants from the laboratory. With them they took a number of cakes of what looked remarkably like the bars of brown soap wherewith the American housewife labors o' Mondays. As much as two men could carry of the stuff they took. The third man bore a rude battery which Zenas had contrived, and a coil of copper wire which the Rutharian smiths had drawn for him, and which he had insulated with woven fiber dipped in gums from the forests.

The tower had been a massive old structure, covering nearly a half acre of ground, and the lower parts of it were still solid. Its roof was gone, and portions of the upper walls had fallen in.

Zenas found that there were a number of chambers below the ground-level of the structure. In the central one of them he bestowed his precious cakes, and with them the end of his copper wire. He directed his assistants to cover the whole over with heavy stones.

"And handle them with care," he cautioned, "or you will come a lot closer to the stars than you are ever likely to be by any other means."

His preparations completed, the geolo-

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gist bade his henchmen to make themselves scarce, which they were very glad to do. Bidding every one in the neighborhood of the tower to withdraw to a distance of several hundred feet, Zenas uncoiled his wire, of which he had brought a quantity sufficient to keep him out of harm's way. He squatted down behind the bole of a big yew-tree and struck the knob of his battery.

For an instant nothing happened, and Zenas, peering forth from behind his tree, felt his heart sink with disappointment. Then very quietly the entire structure of the tower, which was nearly seventy feet in height, quitted the earth. For a second it seemed to hang suspended in the air like some enchanted thing. A hollow booming reverberated across the plain. The tower flew into fragments. The ice-bound surface of the Illia was shattered by the falling rocks. A gust of air rushed across the plain and through the ranks of the Rutharian soldiery and with it a shower of smaller débris, which fell among them like a storm. From the spot where the tower had stood, a column of greenish-yellow smoke arose and hung heavily.

From the camp and the crowds of citizens went up a low moan of awe, followed by a shout of triumph from thirty thousand throats. Men ran across the meadows to view the aftermath of this wonder—such a thing as never had been seen in Ruthar. Where the tower had stood was a hole in the earth, wherein the structure itself might almost have been buried. No vestige of the masonry was left. Not one stone remained upon another, and many of the larger foundation rocks had been sundered into fragments by the terrific force of the released gases of the melinite.

Rutharians from that day on called Zenas Wright "Father of the Thunders," and accorded him a respect second only to that in which they held Polaris.

Janess, the red captain, and Everson, who had been witnesses to his experiment, ran to the side of the geologist and wrung his hand.

"And now do you, Father Zenas, stay away from that laboratory," said Oleric.

"See to it that my men keep to the trick of making this stuff; but do you keep away. Some careless fellow might let a cake of your earth-shaker fall—and we cannot spare you."

"Now show me this Kimbrian Wall," was the comment of Zenas. But the scientist yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and thereafter went no more to the laboratories, except once a day only, to test the purity of the chemicals with which his workmen wrought.

SOON after the destruction of the tower, Oleric, with Polaris and the lieutenant, rode down through the forests to visit the Kimbrian Wall. Now that they were assured of a means to open the way to Adlaz, they were all of them impatient to map out their plan of campaign, in which, as he alone of them all was skilled in such matters, they looked to Everson for counsel.

Three days riding brought the party to the great barrier which the Children of Ad had built far back in the dim centuries to separate them from their hated enemies.

As the riders approached the wall, they found the land narrowed to an isthmus, which Oleric told them was nearly eighty miles in extent, by something less than sixty across. The Kimbrian Wall crossed the neck of land nearly midway to its length, but if anything, a few miles nearer to the mainland of Maeronica than it was to Ruthar. On the hither side of the barrier stretched thick forests of oak and pine. Along the isthmus and near its western sea-border lay the course of an ancient road, which once had connected the two countries. To this old highway Everson gave careful attention. In some places it was broken up and overgrown with timber, but the lieutenant thought that little work would be required to put it in shape for travel.

From a pine-clad knoll in the forest they had their first glimpse of the wall, and a mighty work it was. Built of gray stone, now moss-grown and weather-aged, it stretched away to the right and left as far as they could see and ended sheer with the precipitous cliffs above the sea. So enormous were the stones of which it was constructed that it reminded Everson of remnants of the cyclopean masonry, which are to be found in the old countries and which tradition used to tell were built by a race of giants. Probably this work was as old as they.

The wall was nearly fifty feet high, and so broad as its top that two chariots might pass thereon. At intervals of a mile all along its length were watch-towers, garrisoned by the border-soldiers of Bel-Ar. In addition to all those points of strength, the wall had been so constructed that near its top there was an overhang

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of a number of feet, making it exceedingly difficult for scaling.

Still, Oleric said, it had been scaled, and many times, by small parties of raiders from both sides—and some of them had never returned.

"Look!" the captain exclaimed. "Here comes one of the patrols."

From the nearest tower to the east three men on horseback came riding along the top of the wall, clearly outlined against the pale sky. As they came nearer the forest-watchers could see that the riders were muffled in cloaks. A sharp wind was sweeping down from the south, and it must have been bitter indeed on the unprotected eminence of the wall.

"Ha! 'Tis Atlo himself—the captain whom I replaced at the port," said Oleric as the patrol came opposite him. "See, the foremost of the riders."

Sight of his enemies riding by so close proved too much of a temptation to one of the Rutharian fighting men who had ridden down with the party to the wall. He was a master bowman. While the eyes of his companions were fixed on the three riders, he dismounted and slipped away among the trees to the left. In the shadow of a pine he paused and set an arrow to the string.

It was a long shot—nearly a hundred yards—but the winged shaft flew straight and true. It smote the captain, Atlo, on the shoulder, and the riders in the forest could hear the faint clink as the point fell blunted from the armor which he wore beneath his cloak.

Atlo started in his saddle, then turned and waved his hand, with a laugh. He rode on as if the arrow were a matter of little moment. The other two riders were more timorous than their captain, and they sent many a glance back toward the dark forest shadow as they rode along.

Oleric shouted to the archer to loose no more arrows.

"Let no more raids be made over the wall," Everson directed, "and have a force of men clear and rebuild the old road yonder. Bring it up as near to the wall as may be, without attracting attention. We must attack and take them unawares. We will have to mine underground from the forest to the wall and place our explosives. As soon as the wall is down, we shall throw a force of infantry through the breach, starve the garrison off the wall and hold the territory on the other side against all attack until we can clear the wreck of the wall and lay a road through the gap so that our cavalry and charioteers may pass it. Otherwise, the Maeronicans will hold the breach against us, in which case there would be a delay which we cannot afford—if, indeed, we should be able to fight our way through at all."

Oleric pondered on the plan for a few moments. He looked up with shining eyes.

"A wise counsel," he said. "All of these things shall be done, and right speedily."

ALMOST miracles are the things which may be accomplished by human brains and hands, if there be enough of them and they are united to their work by a common and all-pervading purpose.

Into the old forests above the Kimbrian barrier the Rutharian zinds threw a force of two thousand men and half again as many horses. The ancient roadway through the wood to the foot of the wall was cleared and rebuilt as though by magic. Everson, visiting the scene of the work, reflected somewhat bitterly on the contrast between the manner of this labor and any similar task to be done in the land where he was born.

There, he knew, there would have been the delays caused by failure to supply the necessary materials, and failure again to get them to their appointed places on contract time. There would have been labor strikes, jealousies and bickering among leaders. In the end, of course, the work would have been done, and well done—but with much trouble.

But in Ruthar there were no walking delegates. Happy were the workmen to labor from sun to sun, and others to take up the task in the hours of darkness. Materials were free and inexhaustible, and the zinds and leaders worked together like brothers, each doing what was required of him, as though his very life depended upon it.

Within a fortnight of his first view of the Kimbrian Wall, the lieutenant deemed that the time to strike was nearly ripe. Two months and nearly a half of another of the allotted six were past. Three months and a half remained before Adlaz would gather for the Feast of Years. Three months and a half in which to conquer a nation and take a walled city, the strength of which was a tradition! Yet it must be done. And Everson, when he saw the tools with which he had to work, hoped high. This was an archaic people; but he found its sons good companions; sturdy, truthful, straightforward as their own long sword-

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blades. He believed they would follow to the death and that they would not come too late to the Adlaz gates.

One day, Glorian, who of late had avoided Polaris, summoned the sun of the snows and bade him bring with him his American comrades and Oleric the Red.

"I know that you are nearly ready to go up against the Kimbrian Wall and the hosts of Bel-Ar," she said. "But before that day comes, there is a pilgrimage that must be made to one without the aid of whom perchance your greatest effort would be in vain. Bring horses; for on this journey I ride with you."

Polaris rode a splendid black stallion, splotched with white at forehead and fetlock, which had been the gift of Jastla, of the hills. When they were ready to leave the temple gates, Rombar came barking at the horses' heels.

"Best to leave the dog behind, brother," said Oleric. "We go upon a path where he may find ill-favor."

Cloaked in a wondrous robe of red foxskins, Glorian rode on a cream-colored palfrey, attended by one of her women in waiting only. Never had she seemed more fair and queenly. Like some bright daughter of the white North of the long ago, was she, of whom the skalds have sung in their undying sagas.

From her he glanced to Polaris, who rode beside her. The son of the snows was clad from head to heel in the glittering chain armor which Rutharian smiths had forged for him, and cloaked in the black skin of a forest bear. At his back swung a two-handed sword. A winged helm, brilliant with gold-work and curtained with a hood and cape of delicately wrought links, sat upon his tawny hair. Long since a razor of keen bronze had swept the beard from his cheeks and chin.

Only in the amber eyes had the troubles of the years left their mark—a shadow of sadness when they were thoughtful or in repose, but which did not ill become them.

"She may be a goddess," thought Zenas to himself, "and she is beautiful enough to be a real one; but if she hasn't gone silly as a cow-girl over this lad of ours, then I'm a donkey, and a blind one, to boot. O Trouble, you've worn skirts ever since you quit fig-leaves."

Zenas shook his head. The geologist had never married.

It was no brief pleasure-jaunt on which Glorian led, but nearly two days' hard riding into the northwest from Zeleomaz, across heavily-wooded mountains and through valleys deep with snow.

Leaving the hills at last, the party came to a vast, dark forest, silent, somber and covering the rolling land like a black pall. Into its soundless glades the riders penetrated and rode for miles.

PRESENTLY they saw ahead of them a clearing in the depths of the wood, and a stretch of long buildings, built of stone, and with their windows set high in the walls near their roofs.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Hothouse World

By Fred MacIsaac

Huddled within their glass-cage city they lived, the last survivors of the Ice-Age cataclysm. . . . Only one man dared the hostile world of freezing death without, in a wild despairing fight to turn back the clock and save the smouldering embers of mankind's forgotten courage. . . .

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It was late afternoon when the riders entered the clearing and approached the buildings, which stood about the four sides of a square, enclosing a space of nearly three acres. As they rode into this court, following a path between two of the buildings, the travelers saw that a number of smaller structures of stone and wood occupied a part of the square. Here and there in the court, fires of brush were burning—for it was bitter cold in the forest depths—and dark figures of men passed to and fro about the fires. A pack of shaggy, wolf-bred dogs came yapping at the horses' heels.

"Who comes?" cried a voice. Men bearing spears ran forward from the fires.

"Glorian of Ruthar comes to visit Zoar of the Amalocs," answered Oleric.

Straightway the armed men knelt in the courtyard, and one in a stern voice called back the dogs.

A door in one of the houses near the center of the square was opened, and the form of a man stood there, silhouetted against a flaring light within the dwelling.

"Methought that I heard a voice well known to me, speaking of Glorian of Ruthar and of Zoar of the Amalocs." The tones of the man in the doorway were low, but clear and sonorous as a bell. "I thought it the voice of one Oleric the Learned," the man went on. He bent forward and shaded his eyes with his hand. "Are you indeed come, red one? Ride forward that I may see."

Oleric's answer was drowned in a terrific chorus of squealing groans, which seemed to issue from the larger buildings on all three sides of the square. So unearthly and piercing was the din, that Zenas Wright would have clapped his hands to his ears; but he found his best efforts needed to control his horse. The steeds of all the party snorted and reared in terror of that hideous outburst. They would have bolted, but knew not where to bolt; and presently the clamor was ceased, and they stood still and trembling.

"What demons of the place are these?" cried Polaris. He sprang down from his horse, tossed the reins to the man nearest him, and ran to the head of Glorian's palfrey, which was curveting and threatening to pitch its mistress from her saddle.

"Those are the pets of Zoar," Oleric answered, "the amalocs. They know his voice and answer him in their own fashion." Spurring his restive horse, the red captain rode forward to the porch of the dwelling.

"So, 'tis you, indeed," said Zoar as the captain advanced into the ring of firelight. This time the man spoke softly, almost in a whisper, and was not again interrupted. He stepped to the side of the captain's horse and took him by the hand. "Who rides with you, and why do you ride to seek Zoar?" he asked. "Is the time come, red one? Is it come?"

"Aye; the time is here, Zoar," said Oleric soberly. "Our years have not been in vain. Yonder sits the Goddess Glorian, and holding her horse's head is the hope of Ruthar, whom I have brought up from the sea."

"And the Kimbrian Wall?" Zoar asked.

"It waits but the coming of the amalocs, when we will push it down like a barrier of straw," Oleric answered. "Ruthar stands in arms as she never has before, and the land rustles with banners. We have come to ask your aid. When we know that Zoar of the amalocs is on the march, then will the war-drums be sounded."

"Has the ancient crown touched his brow?" asked Zoar.

"Not yet; we wait your word."

"It is given." Zoar lifted his face to the dim sky. "Beyond the mists the stars of Ruthar shine, never so brightly," he muttered. He laid his hand on the captain's arm.

"On the third day from now Zoar of the Amalocs will march," he said. "Now bring your party within, and they shall enjoy what poor hospitality I have for them, who entertain so few guests."

Men led away the horses, and the travelers entered the hall of Zoar.

"Ah, daughter of the stars," he said, and bowed, as Glorian crossed his threshold, "many years have gone since I last looked into your eyes; but I find that the will burns strongly still, and your beauty has not dimmed. But I grow old, daughter, old and very weary."

Gravely and courteously Zoar welcomed his guests, and bade them rest and sit at meat with him. It was a plain place into which he ushered them; yet was it rich, as the world counts riches, and its wealth was all of ivory. Seats, tables, cabinets, even the casings of the windows and the doors were of ivory—wonderful, finely grained stuff, some of it white as alabaster, and some of it cream-yellow with the tint of age. And the carvings on it must have been the work of years.

Zoar, the host, the travelers found quite as remarkable as his ivory treasure. He was a slight, short man, hardly so tall as

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Zenas Wright and not so stocky as the geologist. He wore a long white beard, and his hair, of the same silver, flowed across his shoulders. His eyes, under bushy brows, were bright and kindly. His step was quick and firm, nor did his limbs or hands tremble. Yet there was on him the stamp of an unutterable, incredible age.

His skin was as yellow-pale as the oldest of his ivory, and the whole surface of it was fretted with thousands of infinitesimal wrinkles. When he spoke or moved it was with spirit and animation; but when he fell into fits of abstraction—and that was often—Zoar looked very like a mummy fresh-stripped from its tomb.

POLARIS the old man regarded with especial interest, and when the meal had been cleared away he sat and talked with him and Glorian for many minutes, recalling odd, old tales of the history of Ruthar, with which he showed remarkable familiarity.

"But Ruthar's greatest story is yet to be made," he said in conclusion of his tales. Then he called his servants to show his guests to their chambers.

"What! Have I ridden all these miles, friend Oleric, and then to be put to bed without the chance to tell you that these wonderful beasts about which you have bragged so much are only elephants after all?" said Zenas Wright, forgetting in his stubbornness the ivory gateway at Zelaomaz.

The red captain grinned and put a question to Zoar. The old man answered with a shake of his head:

"The amalocks love not to be disturbed at night, and especially they love not fires or lights. If you and your friends would sleep in peace this night, I counsel that you wait till daybreak to see the beasts. Otherwise they may revile you in such fashion as will shake your couches and drive all sleep from your pillows."

So Zenas was forced to be content and go to his bed with no chance to crow over Oleric. All night long there penetrated occasionally through the geologist's slumbers the noise of raucous trumpeting and the padding stamp of ponderous feet.

When they had broken their fast in the morning, Zoar led his guests into the court and sent men to throw open the great bronze doors in the front of the nearest of the stone buildings.

"Now for an elephant," muttered Zenas. "Perhaps a mighty big one, but still an elephant." Then Zenas stopped, amazed.

Out through the doors of bronze and into the open court stalked a mountain of flesh and ivory and stood swaying restlessly from one foot to another, flapping ears that would have made a bed covering, and looking keenly about with little, inflamed eyes. Elephantine in shape only was this monster. The points of its shoulders were fifteen feet from the ground—a full yard taller than the most stalwart elephant that ever bore the howdah of a mogul emperor.

Tusks that were ten feet long projected from its massive skull, curving downward where they left the bone and then out and up in such fashion that if they had been continued farther they would have formed spirals. The body of the monster was covered with a coarse and woolly growth of reddish-brown hair, through which there pricked long, black bristles. On the trunk the wool was sparse and the bristles shorter, and one could see that the hide of the beast was a drab-gray. Neck it had none; but along the spine, just back of the skull and extending beyond the shoulders, was a ridge or mane of coarse, black hair.

His face gone white and his eyes round and goggling, Zenas Wright stood and stared up at this Gargantuan offspring of the hinder ages.

"Loxodon!" he breathed.

Never in all his life had the geologist felt so small and insignificant as in the presence of that towering survivor of the prehistoric past.

Zoar stepped forward in front of the beast.

"Ixstus!" he called gently.

The great ears inclined forward to attention.

"Stekkar mal!" the old man commanded.

Down swung the vast, wrinkled trunk in a huge loop, into which Zoar stepped and was hoisted to the table of the monstrous skull—a flat place where five men might have sat and played at cards.

Another word of command, and the mammoth advanced a couple of paces. The snakelike trunk groped forward, and Zenas, wriggling some as he went, was swung aloft and found himself seated breathlessly by the side of Zoar.

The master of the beasts smiled at the other old man.

"When you come again to your own land, you may tell your children's children, if you have them, that you have sat on the head of an amaloc, the grandfather of all beasts," said Zoar.

While Zenas appreciated that honor, it might be said that he was much relieved

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when he got his feet on the ground again.

From building to building of the immense stables, the scientist was led with growing wonder. Ninety and three of the giant mammals there were, of which no one stood less than twelve feet high. But Ixstus was the champion and patriarch of the herd.

AS THE riders journeyed back to Zeleomaz, Oleric told again how the Children of Ad had driven the beasts southward from their lands with fire, and how the men of Ruthar likewise had made war upon them, until they were in danger of becoming extinct.

"But then came the prophecy, and men of wisdom set themselves to study and tame the beasts," he said. "And now, when the wall is down, and Ruthar takes the road to Adlaz, the amalocs shall lead the way, and Zoar and his servants shall drive them against the hosts of Bel-Ar."

"Won't the Maeronicans scare them again with fires?" asked Everson.

"Nay; that has been provided against," said the captain.

"Lady," Polaris said to Glorian, "I have heard and seen many strange things in this country of yours, and I have learned much. One more thing I would ask that you make clear to me. Oleric has, and last night the old man back yonder did again speak of things of the long ago, in which you had a part. What did they mean? You are scarcely of mine own years."

Glorian glanced hastily at Oleric, and then she answered:

"When the world was younger, men had the secret of years. The slave O'Connell told Oleric that it was written in your sacred book out yonder in the world that such was so. That secret was lost. For ages it was lost. But it was found again in Ruthar. I am one of those to whom it has been imparted."

"You mean, lady, that *you*—" Polaris gasped.

"My friend, I first saw the light on Ruthar's hills well nigh three hundred years ago," Glorian replied, and as he involuntarily shrank in his saddle, she added hastily, "It is a matter of the inward will that holds the spirit and the flesh. To only a few is it given to have the will to prevail for a time against time itself. And they are not immortal. Presently old age will come to me as it has to Zoar, and I shall shrivel away—and die." She shuddered.

Polaris looked at this fair, fresh woman, beautiful as a goddess indeed, and by all earthly standards in the first bloom of her young womanhood, and he felt that this matter was beyond his comprehension.

"Are there, then, any others, besides you and Zoar?" he asked.

"One other only—and he rides at your side," she answered. "Oleric the Learned is younger than I by only fifty years."

"Now, my brother, are some of my wild sayings explained to you," Oleric said. "We do not ask that you believe, for this thing is new to you and contrary to all that you have learned. Only the years will show you the truth of what we tell you—if they pass without accidents. For we are not proof against mischance. A sword-stroke may end my days as swiftly as any man's."

"Would you that I impart the secret to you?" asked Glorian. And she turned and looked deep into Polaris's eyes. "You have a will that is stronger than most; and I think that you might well exert it to hold back the years, were you instructed. Say, shall we teach it you?"

"Nay, lady," said Polaris. "I will live my appointed years, be they few or many, and die when my time comes. One short human life, it seems, can hold all the troubles for which a man has heart. And I would not, if this thing be possible, see my friends grow old and die, while I lived on."

Glorian sighed. Then she seemed struck by a new thought, and asked:

"What will happen if Ruthar is too late, and you reach not your friends in Adlaz—and the lady Rose, of whom Oleric has told me? What if you come not to Adlaz in time to save them?"

"I think that I shall be in time," Polaris said grimly. "If I am not, then I think death shall find me on the road—and be welcome."

Zenas Wright, hearing these things, and marveling, became troubled.

"Wow!" he said to the lieutenant. "I can believe anything now. To-day I have seen a living mammoth, and I felt about three thousand years old myself. And now, too, look out for squalls."

CHAPTER VII

POLARIS MAKES HIS CHOICE

DAWN, the cheerless gray of clouded winter, crept over the city of Adlaz, In her bed in the prison-palace of Bel-Tisan the dark-haired Princess

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Memene of Sardanes lay, and beside her was her new little son. But Memene was not well, and Rose knew she would not live.

"Oh, that Minos were here to see!" Memene said faintly. And again—"It is the king he was so sure of." She smiled at Rose. "It is the king, my sister. And he shall be named Patrymion, after a man who is dead—a very brave man." And smiling, she passed away.

When she could control her grief—she had come to love Memene dearly—Rose summoned Brunar and told him what had befallen. The captain heard her sorrowfully, for he had honored and admired the Sardanian princess and pitied her sad circumstance. He sent the old woman out to fetch a younger one to care for the child. And then he brought men to bear Memene away. Out of the kindness that was in him, the captain looked to it that she lay in a fair and pleasant spot, and not where the common people of Ad buried their dead.

Persuaded by Rose, and because he had some knowledge of English and could bear the message, Brunar took horse at noon and rode down to the harbor, there to seek Minos.

This happening was nearly two months after the departure of Polaris and the others who had gone to Ruthar. In the intervening time, Oleric the Red had tried and tried again to get word through to Adlaz, informing those who were left behind of the fair progress of events. Always he had failed until one of his men, by craft and waiting, had gained a place with the prison-guard.

With him Rose Emer managed to get speech, and they arranged that on the following day he should slip away and try to reach Ruthar again, bearing a message from her to Polaris.

* * *

On one of the quays in the harbor of Adlaz sat Minos, the Sardanian. It was cold on the quay, but he did not feel it. His back was weary with carrying burdens, but he was unconscious of that weariness. Why should the body list when the soul is dead within it? Nor did his eyes see the dancing waters of the harbor, where the fademes of Bel-Ar rode at their anchors. Until this day he had counted the hours with hope, and had borne his tasks with patience. Now hope had gone, and the taste of living was as dry dust.

For Memene was dead.

When Brunar had brought him the news, he had heard the captain through, and thanked him gravely. Then he had turned twice in his tracks and fallen like a stone. So long had he lain that Brunar deemed him dead. When he had come back from that swoon, Minos would work no more; nor did any seek to force him. He had wandered aimlessly out on the quay. When night fell, it found him still sitting there.

It was a wild night. The moon shone but dimly, and often was veiled by scudding snow-clouds, and the stars were wan. Far to the south, over Ruthar, a faint rose-pink against the sky told that the southern lights, aurora australis, were playing. Somewhere beneath their flickering radiance lay the lost kingdom of Sardanes that the snows had covered deep. A wind, gusty and fitful, leaped over the mountain-rim and tossed the waters of the crater-lake so that the fademes swung restlessly and clanked their anchor-chains. One by one the mitzl globes among the warehouses and along the quays were hooded, until only the watch-lights were burning.

A soldier of the guard hailed Minos; but the Sardanian answered not, stirred not.

"Now let the fool sit and freeze," said the soldier impatiently. And then he added, "Poor fellow." For he had heard the story of the fallen king, and had a good wife and bairns of his own in Adlaz town.

In Sardanes, Minos had been known as the smiling prince. But for all his patient, kindly ways, he was high-spirited. And once roused, none was quicker to strike than he. Events of the last few weeks had galled his temper. Now, coming out of the stupor into which this final blow had cast him, he was near to madness.

Willingly would have Minos found his way to Adlaz, plucked Bel-Ar from his gilded bed and broken him across his knee. But the way was treacherous, and there were many guards, and he knew that he could not reach the king. Into the south he would have gone, to seek Polaris and to play a man's part in the great war. But that way was closed to him also. The few men that he might slay in the attempt before they pulled him down and slew him would be all too few to satisfy the fires within him that burned fiercely for vengeance. With only a great calamity would Minos be content.

Uneasily tossed the fademes in the harbor, their anchor-chains rattling.

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Finally Minos heard them. Then he knew why they were calling to him.

MANY times in his work about the harbor of Adlaz the Sardanian had been on board the fademes. He had helped to discharge the cargoes of those which came in from the fair islands of the southern seas, bringing strange tropical fruits, dainties for the lords and ladies of Adlaz, and other articles of the commerce which their captains carried on with the savage islanders. On many an atoll of the Pacific the brown Melanesians knew all the steel and gold clad white men who came up from the sea to trade with them.

But they kept out of the track of civilization; for that was their law. Civilized men saw them not, though they sometimes heard tales of them among the savages—tales which, of course, they did not believe.

Working on the ships as he had, Minos had learned much of the mode of their operation. Himself no mean worker in metals, the mysteries of these wonderful ships of the underseas had caught his fancy, and he had studied them. He knew that such a lever turned would start the fademe forward; that such another halted it; and others which caused it to turn and to dive beneath the surface or emerge at the will of its engineer. He also knew where were the levers which controlled the mighty power in the four great shafts of yellow glass and which released the terrible rays of light, the rays of the nameless color, before which all things were destroyed, and which turned even the water that they met into surging vapor.

With that knowledge in his mind and the red fury in his heart, Minos knew why the clanging anchor-chains were calling to him.

It was past midnight when the Sardanian king stood up at the end of the quay. He stretched wide his arms and the iron-sinewed thews of his shoulders and back cracked as he stretched. He glanced up at the distant stars.

"Once aforetime, so told the red man from the sea, those Hellenes who were my ancestors did turn back this nation when it was swollen with conquest and would have mastered all the world," he whispered. "Once more the power of Adlaz rides high, and it makes ready to go forth and subdue it again—and what I leave, may my brother Polaris finish."

In the shadow of a warehouse the king rubbed and strained his chilled muscles back to life. At the side of the wharf he found an open boat, and fetched its oars. Then he rowed cautiously out into the harbor.

Scarce a score of yards from the quays rode the nearest of the fademes. Minos boarded it on noiseless feet, and cast his boat adrift.

In the cabin of the fademe were sleeping two sailors of its crew and the engineer. Them Minos slew with his bare hands. And though the engineer ere he died slashed the king's shoulder deeply with a dagger, he heeded it not, scarcely felt it.

Going on deck again, he unhooked the chain of the anchor and let it slip quietly into the water. Then he closed the double doors fore and aft, and made them fast.

Under the lights in the lower gallery, Minos studied the levers and the engines. At a turn of his hand he felt the vessel sink beneath the surface. Another lever wrenched, and the fademe started gently ahead, and the king felt that he was safely launched on his dangerous venture.

Before he had submerged the vessel, Minos had set in his mind the location of the fademes. There were nearly one hundred and fifty of them in the harbor. Five he knew were on patrol duty constantly off the Maeronican headlands. There were perhaps another dozen sailing the outer seas on the missions of Bel-Ar. Those at anchor in the harbor were disposed in three long, irregular lines, with nearly fifty ships in a line.

Minos had submerged the fademe, which he had taken, some forty feet. When he reached a point which he thought must be nearly under the first vessel in the southern line, he turned off the power and halted. He fetched ropes and tied them, one to the starting lever and one to that which would stop the fademe. Carrying with him the other ends of the ropes, he climbed the ladders to the pilothouse, which rode like a small tower at the top of the fademe.

Here in the pilothouse was a powerful revolving searchlight. Here, also, were the levers which controlled the tubes of glass which projected the deadly light rays.

SWINGING the searchlight to point upward through the crystal roof of the pilothouse, Minos unhooded it, and its bright, white bar of light thrust upward through the water. By its radiance he saw that he was not yet under the first of the fademes. Its golden hull glittered just a few feet beyond the radius of his light. A

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twitch of the rope which he had adjusted below sent his own vessel ahead.

Under the first fademe he halted; and with a grim prayer that the destroying agency might not be out of order, he pressed the lever that controlled the upper shaft of the glass.

With a mighty hissing and seething of the water the indescribable light ray leaped upward, so dazzlingly brilliant in its unknown color that it nearly blinded the man who had loosed it.

Full on the bottom of the fademe above him the light ray struck and played, with the water boiling around it. The metal hull crumpled away like solder before the tinsmith's point. So swift and furious was its action that in an instant Minos saw the vessel above come sinking down. He had barely time to pull his rope and get his own fademe from under. As it was, the descending wreck grazed the stern of his vessel with a jar that nearly unseated him. Thereafter he went more swiftly.

From ship to ship he went down the long line, scarcely pausing under each. Ship after ship he left behind him—sunken and useless wrecks.

Minos had finished with the first row of fademes, and was coming back on the second line, when a guardsman on shore saw an upthrust of furious light from the deck of one of the golden ships, and then saw the doomed fademe plunge down.

Throwing up his hands, the soldier ran across the harbor court, shouting that some captain had gone mad and was destroying the fleet.

Then the harbor that had been still became alive. Lights flashed up. Men ran hither and thither. A messenger was despatched to Adlaz to report to the king. Some sober-minded men and brave launched small boats into the harbor to go out and warn the engineers of the other fademes.

Well near the end of his second line was Minos when he bethought him that his activities must draw attention to him. Then he loosed in succession the other three tubes, and their deadly rays shot forth, one from each side and one below. The king let them roar unchecked, and all around his vessel the water was turned into a boiling inferno. Like the evil genius of Adlaz, he rode on, leaving only wreckage in his wake.

Part way down the last northern line, the end found him.

Engineers on the other fademes had been awakened. Hastily they plunged their vessels beneath the surface and set out against the destroyer. Because of the fierce play of his four rays, they could not come at him from either side or from above or below.

But one pilot steered in behind and, with the blazing peril a fair target, loosed the destroying ray from his own fademe.

From behind him Minos heard a roar of steam and water entering in. A blinding radiance shot through the gallery below the pilothouse, withering all things as it passed. The structure of the fademe crumpled away beneath him.

"Memene!" he cried. "I come!"

Then the rising waters and the great darkness.

So by the hand of Minos of Sardanes perished the mighty navy which the king Bel-Ar had amassed to go forth and conquer the world. Of his hundred and fifty fademes that had ridden in the harbor of Adlaz, a bare score remained to him. And this is the tale which Brunar, the captain, told in the morning to Rose Emer in the old prison-palace of Bel-Tisam, and which she set down and sent by messenger to cross the Kimbrian Wall to Polaris Janess in Ruthar.

MEANWHILE, scarcely had the riders from the forest home of Zoar of the Amalocs come again to Zele-omaz when Everson was off to see to the course of his operations at the Kimbrian Wall. He snatched only a few hours of rest and sleep, and rode out in the night.

On the day after the return, which also was the day on which Zoar had promised to set out with his mighty herd on the road to the barrier, Oleric the Red sought Polaris in the camp to the west of the city, and bade him accompany him to the Temple of Glorian.

Oleric told naught of the meaning of the summons, but rode with Janess through the city, saying little and staring at his horse's ears. Never had Polaris seen the red captain so silent and so thoughtful.

"What ails you, friend?" asked the son of the snows. "Why so moody, as is not your wont? Has aught gone amiss?"

"Nothing amiss," the captain answered. "But a matter is toward that concerns yourself closely—and I know not if I have been wise to keep it from you so long."

He would say no more, and presently they were at the temple.

Oleric led Polaris into the high-domed

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audience-hall, which they found empty, save for the Goddess Glorian, who sat in one of the seats on the double throne, and who looked on Polaris with kindling eyes as he crossed the hall.

To the northern wall led Oleric, and they paused before an ancient panel of black rock, which had been set into the marble at about the height of a man's head. So old was this slab or block of adamant that its surface was all crackled, yet it was smooth as polished slate. Across its face ran carven lines of writing, like the lines of a runic legend.

"This stone bears the ancient prophecy of Ruthar," Oleric said. "Here in the long ago were writ the words of that which we believe is now to come to pass. See how the stone shines. It has been worn smooth by the lips of countless chiefs of Ruthar."

With unwonted solemnity the captain gazed into the eyes of his friend. "Give close heed, and I will read it you," he said, and read:

"In a far time—more than the length of years of three amaloes—a mighty, fair-haired man shall come up from the sea. He shall break down the wall at the north. He shall lead Ruthar and the beasts of Ruthar through the wall. And they shall take Adlaz and destroy the king of Adlaz—"

The captain paused, and again looked strangely at Polaris. He concluded the reading:

"And the man shall be king over Ruthar and Adlaz."

Janess stared at the ancient writing in silence, and his brow clouded over.

"This is the whole of the prophecy of Ruthar—the part of which I have kept concealed from you—though every lad in Ruthar knows it," said Oleric hastily. "I beg of you, my brother, that you will forgive me if I have done ill. But I have thought it wise to keep silence this far. Now is come the time when nothing must be kept back."

He stopped speaking, and both he and Glorian gazed earnestly at the doubtful face of Polaris.

"You mean that I shall be king of Ruthar," Polaris said at length. From one to the other of them he glanced.

The red captain nodded slowly.

"So it is writ in the prophecy," said Glorian. She left the throne, and came and took Polaris by the hand.

"And, O man from the sea, for whom Ruthar has waited so long and patiently, you cannot gainsay us now," she pleaded. A smile of appealing sweetness came to her aid.

"But, lady, to be a king I did not bargain when I came hither with the captain; though," and he smiled, "I was in an ill place to drive a bargain, and might have yielded almost anything. But to be a king —I like it not. I am neither of Ruthar nor of Ad. I am a simple American of common birth. I do not wish to be a king, but merely to go hence with my own people, if I may. And if I did wish it, what of the people? Would they relish the thought of an outlander on their throne?"

Again Glorian answered him:

"It is so writ in the prophecy."

And Oleric said: "And the prophecy is known to all the people, as it has been for centuries. From the wall to the southern cliffs, there is no man or woman in all Ruthar who does not already look upon you as the king. Think well, my brother."

"But would it not do as well if I were to serve you and Ruthar for a while, and those with me, as leaders? Then, when we have won, if we *do* win, might I not go hence? Would that not serve as well?"

Glorian smiled faintly, and Oleric shook his head.

"Nay, my brother," the captain replied. "You must put your hands in the hands of the zinds of Ruthar and swear the oath of kingship. That is the only way. 'And the man shall be king over Ruthar and Adlaz,' runs the prophecy." Oleric traced the writing on the slab with his finger. "By those words do the zinds and the people hold. It is the only way."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then," said Glorian, "the army will not march tomorrow, nor will Zoar drive on the beasts—unless all of the prophecy shall be fulfilled. Then we who have stood as sponsors for you will be derided as cheats and fools; if, indeed, worse things do not befall you and us. And bethink you—those whom you love, who are in Adlaz, will perish miserably, while Bel-Ar and the priests of Shamar mock their miseries. Without you we fail, and without us and the hosts of Ruthar you, too, are powerless."

"You argue strongly, lady, and you, too, comrade," Polaris said. "Still, I like not this prospect of being king. I must have a little space in which to ponder it over."

"It is now nearly noon," Oleric said. "Today the zinds from every province and city of Ruthar ride into Zele-omaz—to greet

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their king. Until to-night, my brother."

"Then to-night will I give my answer—here in this hall," Polaris said, and he turned and went to seek out old Zenas Wright. And neither of the two whom he left behind could have guessed at what his answer would be, though it seemed to them that there could only be one answer. For they had come to know him as a man of surpassing determination, and here was a path in which he did not want to set his feet.

IN THE old laboratory Janess found Zenas. The work of the geologist was completed. Melinite he had turned out of his workshops by the ton, and the most of it had been transported carefully, and was stored in the forests near to the Kimbrian Wall. Now his thunder factory was deserted. Every last man of his force had gone to join the army.

"Yes, my lad, I know," said Zenas, after one glance at Polaris's face. "They have told you about this king business. I know, too—for I know you—that you are bucking it—hard."

"I do not want to be a king, old Zenas, but—"

"Yes, there's a 'but' in it, and a big one. What are you going to do about it? Our red-headed, two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old youngster, the antique lady, and their old father, Methuselah Zoar, have it all cut and dried. If you can see any way out of it except their way, you have devilish keen eyes. I can't, and I've been looking at it for quite a few days. Oleric told me about it all some time ago. Take it, boy; take it. And make the most of it. It isn't every day that one gets a chance to be absolute ruler over a rich country and nearly five millions of people. You'll make a better king than any they've ever had on either side of the wall. That I'll guarantee." And the old man looked at his troubled friend with bright eyes and patted him on the knee.

While they sat and talked this matter over, came a man to the door, crying out that a messenger had come through from Adlaz bringing a written word to Polaris.

The courier was brought in. He proved to be that same Rutharian who had gained a place with the prison guard under Brunar. Already he had told in the city of the destruction of the fademes of Bel-Ar, and Zele-omaz was going wild with the news.

When Polaris had read the letter sent him by Rose Emer, and he and Zenas had heard what the messenger had to add to its news, the face of the son of the snows grew very stern. The kindly old scientist's eyes were moist. After the man was gone, neither of them spoke for quite a time. The two who were gone had been dear friends, and the friendship had been knit by perils and hardships, in which each had learned the worth of the others.

"Now is the score that I have to settle with this king of Adlaz grown long indeed," Polaris said at length, "and I am minded to tilt him for his kingdom, as these folk would have me do. He made a good ending, did Minos; and I do not think that Bel-Ar, even if he come free of Ruthar, will live to see the day when another fleet shall lie ready to go out and win the world for him."

He became silent. While the town, filling up with the arrival of zinds and their retinues, gave itself to rejoicing at the blow that had been struck Bel-Ar, and the old man sat by the fire and dozed, Polaris paced moodily up and down the long laboratory. An hour passed, and the half of another. Then he struck one hand hard into the other.

"Now in all these happenings I think I see my way at last," he muttered.

With the fall of night he cloaked himself and went up to the temple on the hill, and Zenas went with him.

* * *

From every principality and town in Ruthar the zinds had come to Zele-omaz. Those who were too old or infirm to make the journey had sent their sons or representatives. In the hall of Glorian these were gathered to the number of one hundred-and-seven—tall and stately men, most of them, clad in chain armor plated with silver and bossed with plates of steel—for they had come to fight for their king as well as to crown him. A shout went up that made the torches flare, when a guard opened one of the doors of bronze, and Polaris Janess and Zenas came into the hall.

Eager-eyed, they pressed around the son of the snows, to welcome him whom their prophets and their goddess had said would redress their ancient wrongs.

Polaris met their greetings with a heightened color and a glow in his eyes. Almost, he thought, it would be a joy to be the king of such as these—he, the dweller in no-man's land, a waif from the eternal snows.

And the Goddess Glorian, watching him from her ivory throne, smiled to herself, though there was a pang at her heart that

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she could not manage to quench or still.

Presently Polaris stood in the open space at the foot of the throne. The zinds gathered before him in a glittering semicircle, and made silence in the hall.

"Chieftains of Ruthar," he began, lifting his voice so that all might hear, "this day have I been asked to become your king, to take your crown upon my head, to sit upon your throne, to lead you in battle, and to rule over you as wisely as I may—all this because of certain words on a stone which, it seems, may not be changed. Is this your wish, men of Ruthar—to have me, an outlander, as your king?"

A deep-voiced shout was the answer, and every voice said "Aye."

"Then this is my answer, men of Ruthar, seeing that there is no dissent among you: when I came unwillingly to the shores of Maeronica, there came with me a friend, a true man. You have heard much of him to-day. It was he that sank the fademes of Bel-Ar. He was named Minos, and he was the king of a nation that has passed away. That man is dead by a glorious means. Yonder in the harbor he struck a great blow for Ruthar and for the world. He gave his life.

"TO-DAY word reached me by the messenger who brought the tidings of that deed, and the word was that this Minos who is dead, left behind him a son, an infant newly born.

"Now I will yield me to your wishes, chieftains of Ruthar. I will go with you to the Kimbrian Wall, and beyond it. I will fight with you to overthrow Bel-Ar. I will do all that a man may to be the king you wish me. But it is my will that when this son of Minos the Sardanian is grown to manhood's years and wisdom, he shall relieve me of my kingship and become your king, and his son after him, if he have one. That is my answer, men of Ruthar. I thank you for the high honor you would do me."

He turned and bowed deeply to the Goddess Glorian, and then stood back at the side of the throne.

A murmur of surprise arose in the hall, and then was silenced, for Glorian arose to speak.

"Zinds of my people," she said in her clear, low voice, "to the weight of this man's words add that of Glorian's. He comes, this man, from a land where there are no kings. He is willing to fight for you—to die with you. What he promises will fulfil the prophecy by which we hold. It is a noble choice that he has made. It is my rede that you accept it—mine and that of Oleric the Learned, to whom you sometimes have looked for counsel."

As she reseated herself, the red captain stood forth and said simply:

"My brother has chosen well. I stand with him. Should you not agree, I still stand with him, and he and I and such as are faithful to us will break the Kimbrian Wall and perish on the road to Adlaz."

For a short time the zinds took counsel among themselves. When they had done, an aged man—he was Atra, the ruler of Zele-omaz—stood out from among them.

"We are agreed, O goddess," he said. "We will have this man as king until the prophecy is fulfilled and for so long afterward as he will, until the babe be grown to manhood. He is a true man. We are content, and perhaps"—here Atra smiled—"with the passing of the years he may change his mind."

They brought the crown of Ruthar—a heavy torque of gold set with fire-opals—and led Polaris to the ivory throne, and set him beside the Goddess Glorian and crowned him. And he put his hands in the hands of the zinds and swore the oath of kingship.

"Yonder in Adlaz is a larger palace and a wider throne," said Glorian.

"Aye, lady," he answered. "To-morrow I shall go to seek it."

A great feast followed the coronation. When it was done, all night long through the streets of Zele-omaz and across the bridges of Illia, sounded the rumbling of chariot-wheels and the tramp of marching feet. Ruthar was on the march at last, and the destination was the Kimbrian Wall.

So it fell out that the ambition of Minos of Sardanes had not been so vain of attainment. He had won a kingdom for "the king that was to come."

AS NEAR as they dared, Everson's army of workmen had pushed the completion of their broad highway to the Kimbrian Wall, clearing and building up the old, disused road. Trees had been felled and removed where it was necessary, and rocks had been dragged away with much labor—and all with as little noise as possible, so that the men of Atlo who garrisoned the wall might know nothing of the work, and that when the time should come, Maeronica could be taken unawares.

To do that the road-makers had been forced to halt their work two hundred

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yards from the wall, where a belt of thick forest was left standing across the way which effectually screened their operations.

When the roadway had been completed to that point, molelike, the engineers and sappers dug into the earth and pushed on. The old roadway, suiting their purposes well, led to the wall at a point nearly midway between two of the watch-towers, which were distant from one another about a mile. Another circumstance which was favorable to the lieutenant's plan was that the neck or isthmus which connected Ruthar to Maeronica was, though high above the sea, comparatively level.

Back of a knoll in the forest the miners sank their shaft. Twelve feet down in the earth they struck the living rock and proceeded along that, excavating a tunnel, or gallery, eight feet high by ten feet across. This work was done swiftly, for the tunnel was wide enough so that four men might work in it abreast, and as fast as one quartet was wearied another took its place, and the picks were swinging day and night. As the diggers went on, a multitude of workers behind them carried back the loosened earth and shored the gallery up with timbers so that it might not cave.

When Everson returned from the ride to the place of Zoar, he found that his tunnel was ended—against the face of the Kimbrian Wall, which was founded on the rock itself. Following his instructions, the sappers had branched the tunnel right and left along the wall, until the working was in the shape of an elongated letter "T", the cross-arm of which lay along the foundation stones of the wall and was sixty feet long.

With the same ceaseless industry that had built the tunnel so swiftly, they then had attacked the face of the wall with chisels and sledges, cutting in at intervals of about ten feet. This had been difficult work and perilous. The rock of the wall was adamant-hard. However, by attacking the cement in which the stones were set, the miners had been able to remove numbers of the great blocks entire, rolling them by dint of herculean effort across the gallery and into cavities made to receive them.

In that work had been the danger. Eight men had been crushed under falling fragments—first toll of Ruthar in the warfare.

The excavations had been carried into the foundation of the wall a matter of fifteen feet when Everson arrived. He at once ordered that work stopped. Remained only the placing of the explosive. That he superintended in person.

Bar by bar—for the lieutenant would suffer no man to carry more than one of old Zenas's patty-cakes at a time—and with extreme care, the melinite was borne in through the tunnel and packed in the cavities in the wall. The geologist's workshop had turned out a plenty of the stuff, and it was used without stint. Everson judged that he placed nearly two tons of the explosive in each of the six chambers under the wall.

Banks of loose, dry earth were piled about the melinite charges; Everson laid his wires, and his workmen then filled the cavities with fragments of the rock taken from the wall.

Still further to retard the release of the gases when the charges should be set off, the lieutenant set his men to wall up the openings to the chambers, using heavy rocks and cement, having done which, they filled in the cross-arm of the "T" with earth and fragments of stone, tamping all in firmly.

Very workmanlike was the finished task over which Everson nodded his approval and told his grimy legion, "Well done."

During all the progress of the labor the patrols of Bel-Ar rode to and fro along the wall, and never guessed that sixty feet below them in the rock their enemies were planting the fearful seeds that would put forth the red flower of war.

It was midnight of the third day after the gathering of the zinds in the temple of Glorian at Zele-omaz, when Everson walked out of the tunnel for the last time, his wires laid, his batteries ready. Retiring to one of the shelters which had been built in the forest, the lieutenant threw himself on a couch for a few brief hours of sleep.

Five hours later one of his engineers awakened him and told him that the zinds of Ruthar with a great host had gone into camp for the night along the roadway ten miles back from the wall, and that the levies of the upper hills, the light-armed archers, slingers and javelin men, were pouring into the vast camp which had been prepared nearby in the forest.

"And these last swear that when they sleep again it will be beyond the wall," the engineer added.

"Many of them, poor chaps, are likely to sleep there forever," said Everson. "Where is the king?"

"With the zinds."

The lieutenant arose and went out on

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the hillside; for he knew that the time had come.

Calling a messenger, he told him to go and summon the skirmishers from the camp. Presently he saw them coming, long, silent files of men, ghostly in the gray light, picking their way over the snow-covered slopes and among the trees, some of the lines led by zinds and others by their captains.

IN THE forests opposite the wall, Everson posted a wedge of five thousand javelin men, who were armed also with short swords. These were to rush the breach in the wall and deploy on the other side to hold the gap from any assault from beyond until the gap could be cleared and the roadway brought up and through the breach to connect with the Maeronican highway which lay on the other side of the barrier. Back of that force gathered the miners and road-builders.

Right and left along the wall the lieutenant sent bodies of archers and slingers, so they might command the top of the wall and prevent the garrisons of the watchtowers from galling the men at work in the breach.

At each of the sixty towers along the stretch of the wall were stationed some twenty men—a force of nearly twelve hundred in all. Everson foresaw that these in all probability, or most of them, would come to the breach from either side, leaving but few soldiers to man the towers. So he sent two parties of a thousand men each east and west, to lie in the forests near the wall. These were heavy-armed swordsmen and spearsmen. They bore long ladders with them, and it was to be their task to scale the wall, flank the men of Bel-Ar at its summit, and take and hold the watchtowers.

A few miles below the wall lay a Maeronican hilltown, and there Bel-Ar maintained a prominent garrison, composed of a section of his standing army, some ten thousand men strong. These soldiers had proved the bane of many a Rutharian raiding party, and they now gave Everson much trouble in his mind. If they should come up quickly to the wall and drive back his force or retake the towers, his thrust would be all but ill delivered and fail of much of its power. That must be chanced—and he judged by the look of these fighting men of Ruthar that they would stand considerable driving and still not be driven.

Silently the long lines stole into position, and the men sank out of sight among the trees. A small patrol party of Maeronican soldiers rode down the wall from the watchtower to the west, where the mitzl lights burned pale against the sky. They passed on, met the patrol from the east, and both returned—seeing nothing of the menace that lay hidden in the shadows of the pines.

Ruthar had been quiet of late, and a few noises in the forest meant nothing to these soldiers, strong in their position on the mighty wall. Of such things as the pastries of Zenas Wright they had never even dreamed.

In a clump of trees Everson attached his wires to his batteries. He knelt by one of them, and five of his sappers knelt with him.

"One—two—*three!*" he counted.

The six poised hands fell as one.

For a moment, silence; then a burst of hell from the bowels of earth.

From end to end, down all its length, the roof of Everson's subterranean gallery was torn out by the rending gases. From the mouth of the tunnel a mass of rocks, beams and loose earth was belched down the slope with such force that trees fell before it.

Through clouds of falling earth and a drift of smoke, the distended eyes of the Rutharian soldiery saw the basalt structure of the Kimbrian Wall that had stood firm for thirty centuries heave up, sunder, and open, as a gate opens, then come thundering down to ruin. Right in the midst of the chaos of falling rock an awful sheet of green flame arose like a giant fan and stood for an instant against the sky.

Then came the noise. It was neither a crash nor a roar, but a sustained rumbling bellow—as though Mother Earth herself were muttering at this desecration of her aged bones. Such was the power of that tremulous diapason that the forests shook and the hills trembled. Followed a moment of the silence of the pit, and then the clatter and spat of the débris as it showered the slopes and the forests.

"Shields up!" shouted a tall zind of Ruthar, and the next moment he was stretched senseless by a fragment of rock because he had not been quick to obey his own order. Many others were injured, and some were killed. But what did a few deaths matter now? The Kimbrian Wall was down. For eighty feet the gap extended wide and free!

And beyond lay Maeronica.

In the forests and on the hills the com-

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panies cheered wildly as they saw the path the melinite had opened, and cheered again when they saw that the watchtower to the west had been shaken from its perch by the terrific concussion and lay a crumble of stonework at the foot of the wall.

"Into the breach!" shouted Everson. "Through the wall!"

From their lair on the hillsides the five thousand javelin bearers arose gleefully and crossed the space to the gap in the wall at a swinging trot, singing as they went.

So clean had been the sweep of the melinite that it had torn away every vestige of the wall down to the living rock of the isthmus, leaving a wide trench or ditch, stone-bottomed and with sloping sides of earth, which it was an easy matter for the light-armed men to scramble across. But first the soldiers had to throw loose earth into the bottom of the trench; for the terrific pressure of the melinite against the rock had heated it until it was almost molten.

For hundreds of feet around, heaps of earth and pulverized stone sent up columns of the greenish, acrid vapor of the explosive.

On the heels of the javelin men pressed the engineers and road-men, swarming into the breach to fill the trench and make a way for the charioteers and the amalocs of Zoar, which were to follow. Along the screen of forest at the end of the road axes rang, and the trees began to fall.

One of the first men into the breach after the skirmishers had crossed the ragged ditch, was Everson. With Mazoe, chief of his sappers, the lieutenant directed the work at the trench; for now was the time for haste.

Shaken from their beds by the dull thunder of Everson's fireworks, Bel-Ar's steel riders at the eastern tower came clattering down their wall. Before ever they reached the gap, a trumpet sounded on the hillside, the archers and the slingers arose like wraiths from the forests, and the horsemen were met by a shower of shafts and stones that rattled and clanged on their armor and drove them back.

MESSENGERS spend east and west from tower to tower. Within an hour every garrison along the barrier knew that the gods of Ruthar had rifted their fortress and the hillsmen were pouring through. But these soldiers of Bel-Ar were picked men, and they did not fear. Every man-at-arms that could be spared from the turrets was horsed, and they came riding recklessly down their lofty pathway, firm in the belief that their own god presently would have a say in this matter.

At the third tower to the east of the breach was Atlo, captain of the wall. The tremor of the explosion reached even there. While the captain and his men wondered at what it might be, a messenger reached them. Atlo at once sent a horseman down the curving path, one of which led from each tower to the ground on the northern side of the wall, to ride through the forest to the town of Barme and arouse the army there.

Then Atlo armed himself, gathered his men and started west. Straight to the brink of the gap he rode, heeding neither arrows nor stones. At the edge of the breach he dismounted, and while the long shafts of the archers hummed around him and the missiles of the slingers dented his golden armor, he knelt and peered into the gorge below him.

Much the captain marveled at the force which had broken the barrier. His quick eyes of the soldier took in the disposition of the men and fathomed the plan of the enemy. He saw that a swarm of javelin men and a number of companies of heavier armed infantry were through the wall and prepared to defend their ground. More he saw; that the trench below was black with men who labored to fill it in; on the southern side of the wall another army of laborers was laying a broad road over which chariots might pass; and beneath him in the breach a man in mud-stained garments stood on a point of rock directing his grimy toilers.

Breathing a curse, Atlo lifted his spear and cast with all his might. Then he mounted and rode back to the nearest tower to await the coming of his garrisons.

Too late did the archers in the forests shout their warning when they saw that spear-arm poised.

At the foot of the rock Everson fell and lay face downward among his workmen.

Tenderly they bore him out of the trench and up the slope of the forest, those sturdy men of Ruthar who had worked with him and loved him. Four of his engineers carried him, and Mazoe walked beside, trying to stanch the flow of blood. Atlo's spear-point had bitten deeply just above the collar-bone.

At the crest of the rise Everson spoke in a weak voice and bade them set him down. Mazoe knelt and held him.

Through dim eyes the lieutenant peered back toward the sundered wall. He lifted

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his hand slowly and with infinite effort and pointed.

"We have done—good work," he said. "Go on—with it. I fear I shall—not—be with you."

His eyes closed, and Mazoe, who thought that he was sped, burst into tears.

Below in the camp arose a mighty clamor of shouting. Everson's eyelids fluttered open.

"Why do the soldiers cheer?" he asked.

Mazoe listened intently to the shouting.

"They cheer because the king is coming," he answered.

Everson smiled faintly.

"Tell him—I have made—a way—for him—"

His voice trailed away, and he sank into unconsciousness. And though he did not die, he sailed so near to the quiet coasts that it was many weeks before he knew that the work he had begun had gone on without him, and had been done well.

CHAPTER VIII

BEL-AR HEARS THE DRUMS

IN THE early brightness of the morning, the king of Ruthar rode up the southern stretch of the slope toward the wall. With him came old Zenas and Oleric the Red.

Bedight in chain mail rode the king, a shield of shining steel on his arm, his two-handed sword at his back, dagger in belt, and spear and battle-ax at saddlebow. Behind him clattered a company of zinds. Back of them, down the long road as far as the eye could see, marched rank on rank of men-at-arms. These were to pass the wall at once, and push on along the isthmus to meet and hold any force which the captains of Bel-Ar might throw against them.

In the camp in the forest, ready to ride when the way should be cleared, were thousands of the wild horsemen of the hills. As soon as they might pass the breach, they would outstrip the heavy-marching infantry, spread and harry the country, and dash into the mountain passes at the northern end of the isthmus, which must be taken and held before any considerable force could come up from Maeronica and occupy them.

Behind, the horsemen would push on the footmen and the chariots which made up the main host of Ruthar. Such was the plan which had been laid by Everson, Polaris, and Oleric.

As they neared the top of the rise, Polaris and those with him met a little clump of downcast men plodding along the road and carrying a burden. Then Mazoe saw the riders and ran to meet them, holding his arms above his head and weeping.

"What says he? Everson—"

Polaris sprang down from his horse and pushed through the tramping men. Behind him an army halted while he stood and looked into the still face of Everson. In the heart of the son of the snows there entered a pang as keen as that which had stabbed it when he had heard of the passing of the Sardanian King Minos and his lady.

But Zenas Wright, who had bent over the lieutenant, and bared his breast and listened to his heart, spoke up:

"This boy has been hard hit; but he's still alive. With good care—and he's going to get it—I think he has a chance. This jab over the shoulder isn't so bad as it looks."

"Look at him, Father Zenas," said Polaris. "Let no effort that this land can produce be spared to make him whole again; for he is a gallant gentleman, and deserves no such death. His reward from Ruthar for what he has done shall be great."

Mazoe told all his story, and Polaris bent and took the earth-stained hand of the unconscious man in his own.

"Fare you well for a time, Everson," he said softly. "I shall not forget. And I shall find the way you made."

Mazoe and the engineers bore Everson to the camp, and Zenas Wright went with them.

Polaris touched the red captain on the shoulder.

"Captain Oleric, bide you here at the wall until the path is prepared. I make you general-in-chief of the army. Carry out the work which our friend has so well begun. Father Zenas will give you of his good counsel. Build the road as Everson and you have planned it."

"But you—where are you going?" Oleric asked.

Polaris pointed northward to the breach in the Kimbrian Wall.

"I am going to tread the way he made for me," he answered. "When all is well, come on and find me on the other side."

Giving the reins of his horse to a servant, Polaris reached his spear from the saddle and placed himself in the first rank of the footmen, under the great, blood-red banner of Ruthar. A mighty cheer swept

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down the ranks as he joined them. The horsemen drew out to the side of the roadway; a blare of trumpets sounded the advance; the crimson standard dipped and went forward. Over the seamed and broken hill, past the masses of fallen ruin, across the melinite-blasted trench, and through the breach in the wall flowed the iron stream.

As far as they could see it, the little group on the hilltop watched the tall form that strode under the tossing banner.

"This king of ours has a will of his own," muttered Oleric "Now to do the work he bade us."

But first of all the red captain sent for old Jastla of the hills. When the white-bearded chieftain stood before him, Oleric said:

"The king has gone yonder through the wall, Jastla. Take a hundred of your best men—men who know how to die as well as fight. Find the king. Ring him round with a band of steel. Guard him with your lives." Oleric grinned as he added, "'Twill be a task to your liking, old bear. Ever you loved fighting, and this man will lead you to where it is thicker than earth-berries. I have seen him at the game. But watch him well, Jastla; he is of a reckless temper when his blood is stirred, and caution is not his watchword."

Lifting his arm in salute, Jastla replied: "When harm comes to the king, it shall have set its foot on Jastla's corpse." The chief drew a deep breath of pride and satisfaction. "I thank you, Oleric the Learned, for this task. I have trained the lad, and I love him."

Jastla hurried into the forest to the camp. Presently he, too, was gone through the wall on his mission.

When the last of the armed force had passed the gap, another army took its place—an army of pick and shovel men, with chains and ropes and tugging, sweating horses. Speedily the last of the screen of trees was down and the stumps torn out. On a foundation of crushed rock Oleric built up his roadway, and brought it through to the shadow of the Kimbrian Wall; and there he met trouble.

ALL of the day on which Everson was stricken, and through the night and the forenoon following, the builders wrought at the road. Wherever was room for a pair of hands to labor, the hands were not lacking. Still the work was not completed, nor was the ditch filled in.

And the reason for the delay was—Atlo.

From the turrets along the wall to the east the captain had collected a force of nearly five hundred fighting men, and led them in person. Leaving their horses behind them, these warriors marched to the lip of the breach and harassed the workmen of Oleric. Nor could the Rutharian bowmen and slingers come at them with their weapons to do them much scathe. The edge of the wall had a coping which was nearly breast-high. Behind that the defenders were sheltered, and might creep, which they did, to the very brink of the gap, whence they showered the men in the trench with arrows and javelins.

Following the example of Atlo, the under captains of the towers on the western stretch of the wall gathered another half a thousand men and came to the end of the breach on their side. Between the activities of these two parties, the task of the besiegers was made heavy and perilous.

Time and again the red captain was forced to withdraw his laborers from the cross-fire of deadly missiles which the warriors on the wall rained into the ditch. His losses were appalling. Still his men did not falter. When the order was given, they swarmed into the gaping trench, and those who died there were content if they but cast one shovel of earth before the spirit fled.

Oleric groaned in spirit as he watched this havoc, which he had little power to hinder. The distance to the top of the wall was too great to allow of effective javelin-casting, and such weapons as did reach the summit were seized upon by the enemy and turned back on the attackers. Having the advantage of the sheltered height from which to cast and shoot, one of Atlo's soldiers was worth in efficiency a hundred of those on the ground.

"Swords and axes on the top of the wall, and that only, will clear out that nest," said Oleric to Zenas, when the geologist had come back from the camp, where for hours he had labored over Everson, and of whose condition he now had high hopes.

"Where are our ladder-men tarrying?" snarled Oleric, and the captain ground his teeth as he saw his workmen decimated and driven back again. "We have not the time to spare to starve these birds from their perch. Yet if I fill that hole now it will be with the bodies of brave men dead and not with earth and stone."

Bethinking himself of another plan, the captain ordered three companies of heavy-armed foot soldiers up from the camp and sent them into the working to shelter the

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laborers under their shields. By that means a little progress was made; but the work was slow and cumbersome and the toll in lives was still heavy.

Long-delayed relief came in the shape of the fighting men whom Everson had sent out along the wall with ladders. These had lain in the forests until they saw the turrets depleted of their garrisons. Then they had crept up to the wall and erected their scaling ladders, choosing points a number of miles from the breach. That attack was not without its perils and losses. Scant in numbers, but desperate, the defenders sallied out on the wall to turn the storming parties. Many warriors died under the javelins and arrows from above. Comrades took their places as they fell, and at length, by dint of hard fighting, gained footing on the crest of the wall.

Guessing how matters must stand at the breach, the Rutharian swordsmen paid no further attention to the turrets which lay between them and the sea, but set themselves to the taking of those toward the gap. As soon as they carried one of these they were able to augment their numbers from the forces which earlier had passed the wall through the breach, and which now were besieging the towers from the north side, where the sloping pathways are defended by gates and doors of bronze.

By the time the men at the east had taken the last of the watchtowers which intervened between them and the battle at the roadway, their brothers on the western stretch of the wall had passed the ruins of the toppled turret there and fallen furiously on the rear of the Maeronicans who were baiting the trenchmen of Oleric.

From across the chasm where he fought, Atlo saw the new turn of the battle and bethought him of his own flank. Too late! The shouts of dismay from his rear were mingled with the thunder of galloping hoofs.

At the eastern tower the men of Ruthar had found the horses which the defenders had left behind. While the stubborn conflict of swordsmen was waging on the western wall, these warriors mounted the Maeronican steeds and charged down the stone road between the copings, sweeping everything before them.

Brave men, these of the King of Adlaz. Cut off from behind and with the yawning chasm before, they arose from their crouching and turned to meet the new foe. Then a grim and pitiless struggle began on the ancient wall, in which the clangor and clash of arms and the cursing of death-locked foeman was commingled with the screaming of pain-maddened horses.

To the rear, which had become the front, went Atlo. He rallied his men and charged into the teeth of the oncoming horsemen, and kept charging until he died. Neither side asked quarter or gave it. The last of the Maeronican fighting men were pushed over the brink of the gap by the rushing horsemen and died under the merciless blades in the trench.

At the west the fighting was more prolonged and bitter; but the superior numbers of the Rutharians prevailed, and the end was the same.

The Kimbrian Wall was taken at a fearful cost. But Ruthar paid the toll smiling. Now Oleric might push through with his wall speedily and in peace.

WHEN the night of the passing of Minos had worn into morning and disclosed the extent of the destruction which the Sardanian had wrought in the harbor of Adlaz, Vedor, the port captain, Nealdo, head of the harbor guardsmen, and such captains of the fademes as had escaped with their lives met in council in one of the offices at the wharves. Fear sat heavy at the hearts of all; for there was not one of them that dared go up to the city and make a report to the king of the loss of his fademes.

"Not I," Vedor said hastily, when it was suggested that he, as captain of the port, was the logical bearer of the news. "It were worth a man's life to tell the king that a slave has shattered his fleet. Besides, my duties here do not allow me to absent myself. Choose ye some other to carry the tidings to Bel-Ar."

Listening to the discussion was a rough old soldier of the guard. Brenak was his name, and he was a brave man. When it seemed that none of the gilded captains had heart for the task, Brenak stepped forward.

"I will carry the news," he volunteered. "Lend me a horse, and give me a few dekkars to buy wine at the wine-shops in the Street of Sherne, and I will go. It may be my last drinking, though I think not. I fought with the king in the wars, and I am known to him. I think he will spare me."

So Brenak rode up to the city and bought his wine. From the wine-shops he went to the palace and gained admittance to the king and told the tidings, which already were flying from mouth to mouth through the streets.

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"Fool! You are crazed!" Bel-Ar exclaimed when Brenak had made a short tale of it. But in the eyes of the soldier the king saw the truth, and his pallid face turned a shade more pale. In his fury, scarce knowing what he did, he struck Brenak with his closed fist so that the soldier died from it.

For days thereafter the temper of the king was such that those who must come near him did so with fear and trembling. Even his queen, the petulant, flower-faced Raissa, who dared him more than most, avoided him and kept to her own apartments.

Weeks before, when it became known that the captives had escaped, little heed had been paid to their going. They were only slaves, and who cared what became of a slave! Interest in them had been swallowed up in the general indignation at the defection of Oleric the Red and the supposed treachery of Mordo. Only Bel-Ar and Rhaen, the arch-priest of Shamar, had chafed, and that because of the escape of the man whom they had doomed for the slaying of the sacred bull. The king had sent fademes to scour the sea, and one to go up the coast to Ruthar to head the fugitives, should they have gone that way. That fademe had never returned.

These happenings had irked the pride of the king, who, like all despots, was of a wild and ungovernable temper that flared to madness when he was crossed.

Came then the blow of Minos—a calamity which shook the nation and struck the foundation of Bel-Ar's dearest ambition. Without his fademes, his dreams of world-conquest vanished. Small wonder that his lords and ladies feared him and quaked at his approach.

But the king was of a courage and perseverance equal to his temper. When the first shock of the catastrophe had worn away, he took stock of the damage and set about to repair so much of it as might be. At the bottom of the harbor his divers labored among the sunken fademes. Some few of the vessels were raised and rehabilitated. By far the most of them were useless, save for the metal in their hulks. Minos had done his work thoroughly, and the priceless engines, the living power of which was mined from the depths of the earth only by great labor, were nearly all ruined.

Increasing his forces, both underground and in his workshops, Bel-Ar drove his miners and his builders ceaselessly to the replacement of what he had lost.

Some weeks after the destruction of the fademes, rumor came down from the south—fleeting words in the mouths of the people, of which no man could trace the source—that a great host was gathering in Ruthar to assail the Kimbrian Wall. That report the king laughed at and did not believe, or if he did believe, it fretted him not at all. The Kimbrian Wall had stood an unshakable barrier since it had been completed, nearly thirty centuries before. It would go on standing to the end of time. It was well garrisoned, and Atlo was a good captain and vigilant. Ruthar must be mad if it thought to march against the wall.

Rumor, again traceless, spoke further and told that Oleric the Red had appeared in Ruthar, and with him the slaves who had gone with him from Adlaz, and that they had hands in this matter of the wall-storming. Bel-Ar heard that also, and smiled grimly. Let Oleric and the slaves, if they were indeed in Ruthar, keep well within its boundaries, if they set any store by life.

Progress was being made with the reconstruction of his fleet, and the king's poise was returning. Once more his court, that had been silent and almost deserted, echoed to the laughter of the gay courtiers, and Raissa sat upon her throne and toyed with the pearls that she loved.

Then one afternoon a wan and haggard-faced man, spurring a weary horse to its utmost speed, rode in through the southern gates of Adlaz and clattered up the broad avenue to the palace. From the mountain town of Barme he had come, riding two days and a night by relays of horses and leaving some of his hard-ridden beasts dead along the road. So nearly dead was the rider himself from the rack of that journey that he fell from his horse at the palace gates, and men of the guard carried him before the king.

From the floor of the audience-chamber where they laid him, the soldier raised his arm in salute and cried weakly:

"The Kimbrian Wall is sundered, O king. She whom they name the Goddess Glorian of Ruthar cracked the wall in twain with thunders and green lightning that shook the land like a hammer." (So the messenger described the melinite mines of Everson.) "Through the wall poured a great host, which is rolling down upon Barme. Atlo is dead at the break in the wall. From the center to the sea-wall, the towers are held by Ruthar. Men say that the dreadful beasts of the forest are coming to make

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war on the children of Ad. Ruthar has crowned a king—a giant with hair of gold, who came up from the sea with Oleric the Red, who was your captain—and he leads the armies against Barme."

Ending his tidings, the man lost grip of his wits. His head fell on his arm, and he slept. Nor could he be roused for many hours.

"Now, here is a message with meat and spirit," said the king. Bel-Ar, who went near to madness when he heard of the loss of his fademes, could laugh when he heard that an army was marching against him. Of all the news only one thing galled him, and that was that the yellow-haired slave from the hated world to the north was kinging it in Ruthar.

SUMMONING his captains, the king banished his court of fluttering butterflies and filled his audience-chamber with the clash of golden armor. No sluggard was Bel-Ar when his foe was on the march, but a wise and resourceful leader. When his mind was not clouded by the rages which at times came upon him, he could plan with the best of his generals.

Bel-Ar in his early youth had been a soldier, and he, too, had fought Ruthar at the Kimbrian Wall. Since coming to the throne of Maeronica he had put down two rebellions, leading his armies in person and waging with a strong and ruthless hand a warfare that had entailed the taking of cities.

First move of the king was to despatch his messengers south and north to raise all the levies of Maeronica and the garrisons of the cities which were tributary to Adlaz. These he directed should be assembled at the crook of the river Thebascu, as the birds fly, ninety miles to the south of Adlaz. He sent Fanaer, one of his most trusted captains, in hot haste into the south to gather what forces he might and stem the tide of invasion until the main host could be mustered and brought up.

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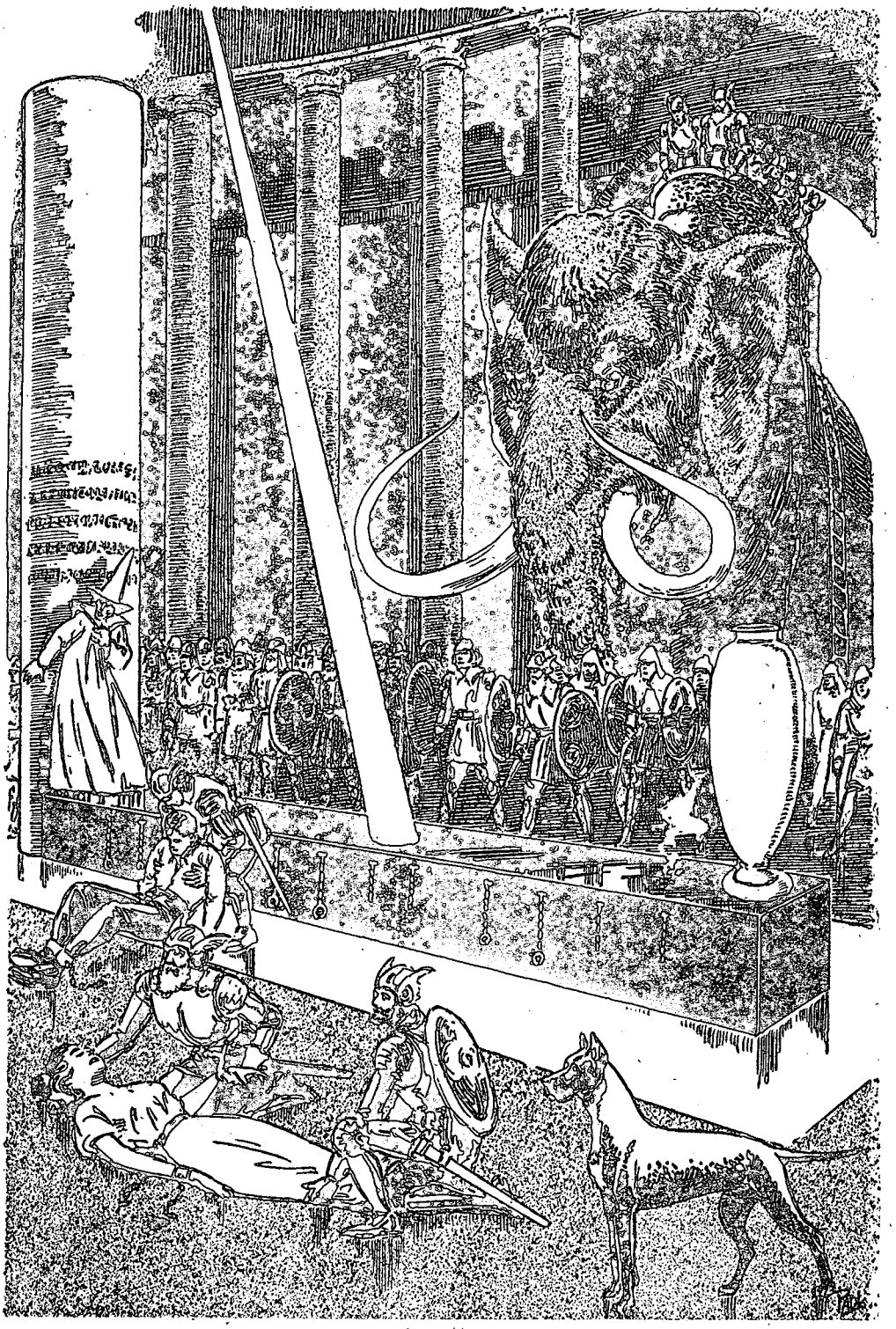

"Let none interfere—unless this slave is afraid to fight!" cried the king.

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Before night-fall the war-drums were beating in ever city and hamlet of Maeronica.

"If these rash forest wolves and their slave-king win through Barme and the mountain passes and overwhelm Fanaer, which I doubt, then we will meet them beyond the Thebascu, on the plains of Nor," said Bel-Ar to his councilors.

"How they have broken through the wall, I know not; but warrant that it is some trick of the strangers.

"As for the great beasts whereof the soldier spoke, I believe that they were all dead many years ago. Surely no man of Ad can say with truth that he ever has set eyes on one. They are but a myth wherewith Ruthar would affright us. And if they be alive, and as terrible as tradition tells, I am not afeared of them. We will drive them back with fire, as once before our ancestors drove them, in the days before the wall.

"Friends, I welcome this war that has come to seek me, for I was growing dull and rusty with inaction.

"If the wall be truly down, then will we drive Ruthar speedily to the other side of it—and having so done, we will follow on and bend the necks of these stubborn mountain boors to the yoke that has long awaited them."

So he dreamed; so he spoke and heartened his captains.

Two days later the trumpets blew at the southern gates, and with a rumbling of drums and a tossing of banners overhead, the first division of the garrison and the levies of the city of Adlaz, thirty thousand strong, marched out the Mazanion Road for the plains of Nor. At their head, under the rustling folds of his war-standard of gold and blue, rode Bel-Ar, the king.

* * *

To Rose Emer, grown pale with waiting, Brunar brought these tidings in the prison of Bel-Tisam.

When she heard that the wall was down, and that Polaris had set his face toward Adlaz, her joy, which she strove to conceal from the captain, knew no bounds. After Brunar was gone, the girl bent over the cradle of the little Patrymion, now a thriving youngster.

"Ah, little mischief," said Rose, and shook her finger at him, "not much longer in this prison for you and me. Friends are coming, Patrymion; friends who will set us free."

Patrymion, who had small care for what destiny had in store for him, so that his immediate requirements in goats' milk were satisfied, sucked a pink thumb and blinked up at her out of sleepy eyes.

IN THE meantime, telling off companies of men to east and west to aid in the fight at the wall by laying siege to the towers, Polaris pushed straight ahead through the forests toward the town of Barme. Counting in the forces of light-armed soldiery who had preceded him through the wall, the son of the snows had in command a division of nearly seven thousand men. Of these there were a thousand archers, fifteen hundred slingers, two thousand and a half of javelin men, and nearly two thousand more of heavy armored footmen with swords and spears.

Two hours along the way, Jastla and his picked hundred passed swiftly up the lines and joined the vanguard. Tall and stately men of the hills were these, led by the old chieftain, scarcely a one of the company under six feet, and splendidly armed after the fashion of their land.

"Here be a few lads of the rocks who would have a tale to tell to their sweethearts when they go home again," said Jastla as he fell in beside Polaris.

With small scouting parties thrown out ahead of him, Polaris hastened on. It was his plan to meet and intercept any expedition which might be sent from Barme to the relief of Atlo at the wall, and so to prevent interference with Oleric's work at the breach. In this fortune favored. For the javelin men ambushed and cut down no less than three riders sent from the wall to rouse the garrison at Barme; so that the first news that reached the town and the Captain Broddok, who commanded there, was brought in by the peasantry of the hills who fled through the forests before the advance of Polaris.

Mightily disturbed, and not knowing the strength of the force which was marching against him, Broddok held his men under arms in indecision until it was too late for him to go to the wall. In the evening of the day after the breaching of the wall a battered soldier who had escaped from one of the turrets and slipped through the Rutharian cordons brought word to Broddok of the end of the Kimbrian fighting and the fall of Atlo. Then the Maeronican commander despatched a relay-rider to Adlaz and made ready to defend his own gates, around which the jaws of Ruthar were closing.

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From the lower end of the isthmus a number of passes led through the mountains into the forests, beyond which were the plains of Nor. Through only one of these defiles lay a direct road, broad and suitable to the speedy passage of an army with its impedimenta and provision trains. That path was bestridden by the town of Barme.

Midway of the pass and near the foot of its western precipice was a low, bald hill, over which the road lay. Around the lower slopes of the hill straggled the town, and at its summit was the walled citadel. It was a strong place, made so both by nature and by man. So closely did it nestle to the towering face of the defile's acclivity, and so rounding was the bulge of the mountain wall, that if one climbed to the top and looked down the precipice, he would see only the houses of the lower town and the citadel would be entirely hidden from him by the rock. At each side of the hill was rocky, wooded land, cut through by many gullies and the ravines of mountain streams.

A hard place to come at, Polaris thought, as he stood in the gorge and looked at the hill by the dim light of the stars—for he came to Barme in the night. Yet it must be taken, and that speedily. The swiftest road into Maeronica lay over the hill, and the citadel's gates were the gates of the road also.

An hour before the dawn he occupied the town, from which most of the people had fled, and attacked the fortress furiously, thereby losing many men. Though the walls of the place were not high, they were ably defended. Broddok was a skilled general, and his garrison was superior in numbers to the force which laid siege to his stronghold. Still Polaris, counting on the speedy arrival to his support of the van of his main army, kept up the assault until well into the day, trying in turn every point of the fortress—and failing at every turn.

Finding that attempts against the wall availed them nothing, for they were without siege machinery, and Broddok's swordsmen clustered so thickly on the parapets that no footing could be gained thereon with ladders, the Rutharians boldly assailed the main gate to the citadel. Cutting a tree from the forest, threescore stout men bore it to the gate. While the archers and slingers from the tops of the nearest houses of the town swept the citadel walls with clouds of missiles, the men in the street swung their battering-ram until their arms were weary. But Broddok's doors were strongly built of oak, reinforced with bars of steel and set well within the arch of the gateway. Beyond the snapping of a few chains, the ram did them little damage.

Maeronicans on the battlements mocked the men of Polaris with sharp words and sharper weapons, and through mortises in the vault of the arch poured down streams of boiling water. The Rutharians lost fifty men-at-arms before they desisted from the assault.

"Smoke them out," was the counsel of Jastla.

Fagots were fetched up from the town and drenched with oil, and men set fire to them and ran and cast them blazing into the archway.

This means might have succeeded in burning away the stubborn oak. But the Maeronican captain, tiring of the din at his gates, mounted five hundred horsemen, opened his portals, and charged so fiercely through the fire that he cleared the street, and for a time his doors were unmolested.

THROUGH the defile a chill wind swept from the north, carrying with it a light drift of snow, and Polaris's men found it cold work roosting without the walls. They had left their camp carrying food for only a two days' march. The country through which they had come was wild and sparsely settled, and offered little opportunity for foraging. When they began to feel the pinch of hunger, Polaris ordered his men to go among such of the townsmen of Barme as had not been frightened from their homes, and gather provisions, paying for all that they took with gold, for he would have no looting.

And those orders were in part, at least, obeyed.

Smoke was curling from the chimney of a small house in a side street near where they stood, and Jastla said to the king:

"While these fellows are filling their bellies, let us look to our own. I could eat the wolf for which I am named, I am that hungered. See; here is a house and fire. Let us go and seek food."

When they had struck upon the door, it was opened by a little lad, who stared at them, round-eyed, and then fled screaming across the room.

"Ai! Raula!" he cried. "Here be two giants from the forests. Will they eat us, think you, as Darno said they would?"

"Not so, small man," called Polaris

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gently, who had learned somewhat of the Maeronican tongue from Oleric. "We are two hungry men, indeed; but we would not harm little boys; and Darno, whoever he may be, should not affright you with such tales."

At his words, a lean and fierce-eyed girl stood up from the fireplace where she had been crouched and came to the door. She clutched a baby to her breast. While she eyed the two men sourly, there was no fear in her regard.

"Now who may you be, who wear the arms of a forest raider, yet who know our tongue and bespeak a child so fairly?" she asked of Polaris.

"I am a soldier of Ruthar, lady," Polaris said, bowing to her. "My comrade here and myself are cold and hungry. May we be warmed at your fire and eat a little of the bread and meat yonder on the table? We have had no food for many hours. We will pay you well."

The girl pressed closer and peered up at him.

"Ah! I know who you are now," she said triumphantly. "You are no robber of the hills, though belike your comrade is," and she shot a glance of no favor at Jastla. "You are neither of Maeronica or Ruthar. You are the mighty man who came up from the sea to lead the south against the north and take Adlaz." She laughed discordantly. "Well, you have made a good beginning, they say; but you have a man's task ahead of you.

"Come in and eat and be warmed. I care not. All the menfolks have fled the house to the hills in fear of you. I stayed, I and little Telo, here. I fear no soldiers. Nay, close that door behind you, old man; I would not that winter came in with you and sat at meat."

Laughing grimly into his beard, Jastla made fast the door. While the two men sat and ate, the girl resumed her crouching by the fire, where she crooned over the babe, at times staring furtively at Polaris. Telo soon conquered his fear of the strangers and climbed to the knees of Polaris, where he fingered the big man's chain armor curiously and prattled many childish questions.

When the hungry men had finished their meal, the girl spoke up again:

"Say, man from the sea, I have heard that there is a beautiful lady who waits for you in a prison in Adlaz town. Is that true?"

"Yes, lady, it is true," Polaris said; and he sighed.

"And you lead a great host thither to set her free?" the girl persisted.

"Yes, if I may."

"But to get on the way to Adlaz, you must take this fortress of Barme; and you find it a hard nut to crack. Is that not so?"

"That is true, also, lady."

"Well, hark you, man." The girl stood up and came to the table. "You who are true to a woman as few men are ever true; perhaps the poor, despised, cast-off Raula may aid you somewhat in this undertaking."

While Polaris stared at her and Jastla grunted, she went on:

"Oh, for your wars, and for who is king, I care not. Still, I would see that lady in Adlaz town go free—if you are strong enough to pass Bel-Ar and his army. Those matters you must look after later. But listen. Other men are not so true as you are. There is one in the fortress yonder who once thought Raula fair. Now she is a deserted wife, while he seeks other maids to listen to his lies. Oh! how I hate him!" She spat the words and stamped fiercely on the floor.

"I would see that man humbled and cast down. I would see his red blood on the stones at my feet.

"There is a way into the fort, a hidden way, which is known to none but me and Telo.

"Now, Telo here shall show you that way. There is a spring on the hill. 'Tis back of the stables, in a grove of stunted trees. It flows down through the rock under the wall and escapes on the hillside. Years ago, when I tended cows on the hill, I found the entrance. The water has so worn the stone that one may climb its course from the old cowpath to the brow of the hill. If a girl can clamber there, surely active men will not find it at all hard to do.

"When night is fallen, bid your men to storm the gate again. Then, if your force is strong enough to make the venture, take a part of it and gain the hill. While those of Broddok's men who do not watch the walls are sleeping, you may fall upon them and open the gates."

Polaris and Jastla looked on the girl, amazed.

"Stare not at me," she said. "I am an outcast and reckless woman—and I would be revenged. Besides, we poor folk care little what the fate of Bel-Ar may be, who does oppress us so that life is a great weariness."

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IT WAS arranged that they should come back at nightfall for the boy, and Polaris and Jastla left the house. When the chieftain fingered his pouch and would have paid her for the entertainment, Raula would have none of his gold.

"This night's work will be pay enough for Raula," she said.

After they had gone, Jastla set a soldier to watch the house and report to him if any left it; for Jastla trusted no woman and feared a trap. His fears proved to be unfounded. No one left or visited the house through the afternoon.

For the remainder of the day Polaris rested his soldiers, and kept up only the semblance of an attack on the walls of Barme citadel. He wondered much at the delay of the army of Ruthar, having as yet learned nothing of the fighting at the Kimbrian breach; but he was resolved to delay not himself, but make the attempt on the fortress as the girl Raula had suggested.

With the fall of night he brought the bulk of his force up into the cross-streets near the gate and posted sentries to see that none passed from the town to the fort. Then he went to the house of Raula and fetched the lad. Telo was afraid of the night and the many armed men, and would go only if Polaris, whom he trusted, would carry him.

"Show him the spring at the head of the old cowpath, Telo," said Raula, and to Polaris, "Bend down the clump of evergreen bushes above the spring, and you will find the way through the rock. Beware of the sentries at the stables. Once one of them nearly slew me when I came suddenly on him out of the dark." She bent nearer and whispered:

"Perchance you will meet and slay Broddok, the captain. I pray you do. And ere you smite, tell him that Raula, daughter of Hecar, sent you to him."

As Polaris went out to the street, with the lad on his shoulder, he heard the girl's shrill laughter within the house—laughter that made him shiver.

Followed by a thousand of his swordsmen, including the hundred men of Jastla, Polaris marched silently around rough devious streets to the side of the hill, and then into the rough ground where the boy directed. It was a dark night, for the stars were dimmed by storm-clouds, and the going was slow. Raula had said it would take at least an hour and the half of another to gain the crest of the hill, and Polaris had ordered his men in the town to hold their hands until they should hear his trumpets, and then to attack the gates of the citadel with trees and fire.

At the spring the clump of bush was found easily, and behind it in the face of the hill was a hole in the rock, so low that a man must bend nearly double to enter it. Here Polaris gave Telo into the arms of a young Rutharian soldier, bidding him bear the lad safely back to his sister.

Bending down, the son of the snows entered the hole. Jastla, who never let his charge beyond arm's reach, crowded in at his heels. For six feet or more they walked with their knees nearly to their chins, and then were able to stand upright. The girl had told them that a light in the passage could not be seen from above because of the trees, and one of the soldiers had nursed a smouldering torch under his cloak. That was brought in and whirled into flame, and they proceeded along a narrow gully, over the floor of which the water trickled.

"Oof! That maid must have been very love-sick, or she has the courage of a fighting-man, to have climbed this place in the dark," muttered Jastla, as he surveyed the gloomy cavern.

For nearly three hundred yards the party followed the subterranean ravine, the floor of which sloped upward sharply. It ended in a shaft that was nearly perpendicular, which the men must climb by the aid of jagged rocks where the course of the stream had been worn for centuries.

The torchbearer was posted at the angle, so that the light might be shed both down the passage and through the shaft. Wrapping his sword and spear in his cloak to prevent them from clanging against the stones, Janess, insisting that he should be first, went silently up through the rock, and Jastla followed close behind. They came out at the top through thick bushes into a basin or pool, where the water was ankle-deep. They were inside the wall of the fortress on the western side of the hill-crest. Around the pool was a grove of stunted trees, to the east of which lay the low, wooden stable buildings. South of the stables were the stone barracks of the garrison.

MAN by man, the Rutharians came up through the darksome hole and took cover among the trees, until the grove bristled with swords. Polaris and Jastla worked their way to the edge of the wood nearest the stables.

The chieftain pointed to the wooden buildings.

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"We will fire them," he whispered, "and have a light to fight by."

As he spoke, a sentry paced out from the shadow of the stables and passed along the edge of the grove to the wall. So near he passed to the hidden men that they might have reached out and touched his shoulder.

"Now that man must be disposed of," muttered Polaris, "and I like it not, this smiting of men from behind."

No such niceties of warfare ruled Jastla. When the man came back, the chieftain stepped noiselessly from the trees behind him. For a pace or two the big mountaineer trod in the tracks of the unsuspecting sentry. Then Jastla sprang, and a brief and wordless struggle under the trees followed. A dagger flashed. Arising, Jastla took the cloak of the fallen man and stepped calmly into his beat. At the corner of the stable the chieftain met and slew the second sentry.

At the side of the stable the Rutharian swordsmen formed for battle. A man with a torch ran from point to point along the rear of the buildings and set fire to the timbers. As they caught and the flames leaped crackling up, the frightened horses began to pound and scream.

Polaris bade his trumpeter blow. The notes blared piercing clear. The swordsmen broke cover with a roar and charged the stone barracks. Lighting torches at the blazing barns, men ran with them to light the way. Hardly were they half-way across the intervening space when there was an answering flare from the streets below, and the thunder of the battering-ram announced that the fight at the gates was on with redoubled fury.

While half of his force entered the barracks and fell upon the bewildered men there, Polaris, with the remainder, swept down the broad roadway, past the dwelling of the officers. Cutting their way through the defenders of the gate, the Rutharians tore out the bars, and their comrades in the streets swarmed through and up the hillside.

In the midst of the wild mêlée that followed, Broddok did the only thing that he could do to save his skin. He rallied such of his men as were under arms, fought through to the stables, and released the fear-maddened horses. All who could of the Maeronicans mounted in haste. For a moment it seemed that the captain would give the order to charge down the street into the fighting press, where the men of Ruthar were putting his comrades to the sword. But Broddok thought better of it.

With nearly four hundred men, the captain rode down the northern slope of the hill, opened the road-gates there, and galloped off through the pass, leaving his leaderless garrison to fend for itself.

When that became known, the Maeronican soldiers, beset on both sides and confused and disheartened by the suddenness of the stroke, threw down their arms and surrendered, on promise of their lives.

So fell the strong fortress of Barme, because its captain had broken faith with a woman.

With the first light of morning, Polaris sent his prisoners south toward Ruthar under a strong guard. Leaving a thousand men under one of Jastla's hill-captains to hold the citadel, the son of the snows pushed on through the pass with the remainder of his division.

That move of his came near to costing Ruthar a king.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF THE BEASTS

SEATED on her ivory throne in the empty hall of her temple, the Goddess Glorian fought within her heart a battle that was every whit as fierce and hard as that of Ruthar in the field. In that sounding citadel two forces stood arrayed, one for good and one for evil, and the conflict between them was passing bitter. It was the world-old war of duty and love that has ever torn the heart of woman.

No outward signal of the struggle marred the supernal beauty of her face. She sat as one sits who is thoughtful and somewhat weary. Light-rays that stole down from the windows in the lofty dome wrought strange effects of fire in the wonder of her hair—fire which smoldered and glowed and ran in tiny sparks along the silklike filaments. Her head was slightly bowed. The slender hands, which lay in her lap, were quiet and listless. Only in the depths of her eyes was she betrayed. In those red-brown deeps, could one have seen them through the half-closed lids, one would have found a pleading misery that would not still, almost a terror.

Compelled by the ancient secret and a will that never slept, the passing years had dealt splendidly by Glorian. Experience they had given her, which is more than knowledge, and patience, and an almost supernatural poise; but they had not made her more than human.

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And a man had come.

Why should she give way to this other woman? Why should she not reach out and take that for desire of which her soul yearned and her heart was consumed by flame? 'Twould be easy. A delay, a word in the ear of Zoar, a seeming mischance—and the priests of Shamar in Adlaz would clear her way. Why should she shrink and hesitate?

The man had said that, were he too late, he would die upon the road. Well, that might be prevented. Besides, men do not die so easily, and time will heal all heart-wounds. But will it? And were that other woman dead, could Glorian win him to herself—this man whose will was as strong as her own?

He was through the wall now and on the road to Adlaz. Oleric had sent messengers to tell her that. And they had told her, too, of that brave friend of his, who had nearly given his life while opening the way. Many had died—her own countrymen—and many more would die—and why? Because of an ambition which she herself had nurtured and kept bright—now hollow and of no appeal. What should Glorian care who held dominion over Adlaz or over Ruthar—she, who desired only peace and to rule in the heart of a man?

All of a long afternoon she sat there, and a statue were not more still. For the better part of the night the struggle raged on above her pillow, and left it drenched with tears. Then evil fled the field, and she who had mastered her spirit slept dreamlessly until the morrow.

In the morning she sent away her tire-women, and ordered that a horse be equipped for a warrior and left at the temple doors.

When that steed went down the hill there was no one in all Ruthar who would have known that the Goddess Glorian was the rider. For she was arrayed in the glittering armor, silver-wrought above its steel, of a Rutharian zind. She wore a closed and vizored helm. A sword swung at her back, and there were both ax and spear at her saddle-bow.

"I will go down with him into the battle," she whispered, "and let things fall out as they may. Some day, somewhere, my time will come. My soul has promised it."

She crossed the Illia and rode northward through the forests.

* * *

After the fall of Atlo the fighting went on at the wall for the rest of that day, the Rutharians storming tower after tower, until they held every turret from sea to sea. Through the afternoon and the night and the next day Oleric pushed on with his road, working his men in relays, and snatching for himself only brief spells of sleep. Through the night in which the king of Ruthar stormed and took Barme, the sappers and miners labored on at the breach.

Morning saw the task completed.

First through the breach went a flying squadron of the horsemen from the hills, six thousand strong, led by two of the mountain zinds, Maxtan and Albar. After them marched a great division of infantry, nearly fifty thousand of them, the chest of the army, each section carrying with it a number of companies of archers and slingers. Then a force of nearly thirteen thousand chariots rumbled through the breach—these following the infantry because they would be of little use until the host should pass the mountain defiles to more level fighting ground. Followed an endless train of baggage and provision wains.

No siege machinery was carried, for two reasons. Rutharians long ago had found such engines as their skill had devised to be powerless against the Kimbrian Wall, and had lost faith in them. Secondly, certain carefully handled bundles from the laboratories of Nematzin were judged to be of more avail than any catapult, ram or mantelet.

At intervals Oleric halted the divisions to allow of the passage of more cavalry, which spread out at each side of the main array and rode down through the forest paths of the isthmus.

For more than twelve hours Ruthar poured her armed men through the breach in the barrier, with scarcely a break—and the way was wide. Reserves in the camp and on the wall cheered the various regiments as they went by, marching under their banners and to the music of pipe and drum.

Last of all, over the slope and through the gap came Zoar of the Amalocs with no less than fifty-eight of the monsters of his herd. In single file the amalocs marched, each holding fast with his trunk to the tail of the beast ahead, as elephants are wont to do. Ixstus, father and patriarch of the herd, led the line, and on the mighty head of Ixstus rode Zoar, the master.

On they came, these mountains of red-wooled flesh, swinging their gleaming wealth of ivories. Though their shambling

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tread was soft and padding, the roadway, made smooth and hard by the passing of thousands of feet and hoofs and wheels, shook under their advance.

Zoar had been preparing against this day for many years. All of his beasts were armored for battle. Their heads were protected by immense bosses or shields of steel. He had also armor for their forelegs, with chains, which could be attached in such a manner that they would swing out when the animals charged, and strike down any living thing that came near them. The tips of the spreading tusks were equipped with sockets, to which sharp steel points could be fitted. More than half of the great brutes bore fighting turrets on their backs, in each of which was room for a half a score of men. A few tons more or less of metal and men meant nothing to the boundless strength of an amaloc.

Until he saw that Zoar had passed the breach, Oleric waited. Then he took horse and rode forward. Zenas and certain of his workmen had gone through with the first of the cavalry. With them had gone the dog Rombar. The animal had escaped from the laboratories in Zele-omaz, where Polaris had left him, and had come into the camp half starved and nearly frantic with anxiety to find his master. Zenas could not withstand the appeal of the brute's dumb search, so he took Rombar along. Everson, getting better of his wound, still sick and delirious, had been transferred to Zele-omaz and lay at the house of Zind Atra, tended by the best medical skill in Ruthar.

When the head of the host was some six hours upon its way, it met the first of the long lines of captives, which Polaris had sent back from the storming of Barme. The cheering which greeted the tale of that exploit of their king passed down the marching regiments like a gale and through the Kimbrian breach into Ruthar. When Zenas, with the riders, clattered up the hill in the gorge and saw the strength of the citadel that had been taken, his heart beat high with pride for what his boy had done.

Learning there that the king had passed on to the north, the horsemen, their numbers continually augmented by new companies from the rear, pushed on along the road in the hope of overtaking him.

IN A dark and narrow glen, wild with rocks and trees, with a mountain wall at his back and steel death, many-handed and triumphant, closing in along his front, a tawny-haired giant crouched warily among his thinning ranks of fighting men. If ever a man was hard beset, it was the king of Ruthar. Hemmed in where there was no way of escape, he waited with his dwindling company the fifth charge of a horde of Maeronican warriors, who were forming for the rush at the mouth of the glen. Gone wild with glee were the sons of Ad. They had trapped the king of Ruthar like a wounded bear. Great would be their reward from Bel-Ar if they took him.

Among the rocks and bushes lay a grim reminder in shattered men of four previous charges. Some comfort it was to those who waited above to know that for every one of Ruthar who had gone to the stars, at least two of Bel-Ar's men had traveled the same path—or perhaps to the sun; for the Maeronicans prayed to Shamar.

After leaving Barme, Polaris had led his followers along the main road, and they had almost reached the end of the pass, where it debouched into the forests of upper Maeronica, before mischance overtook them. It came in the shape of that same Captain Broddok, whom they had driven from his blazing hold at Barme.

Broddok had ridden through the pass at speed, and beyond it had met a strong outpost of cavalry and five regiments of foot-soldiers, sent up to hold the passes. For Captain Fanaer had already arrived in upper Maeronica.

Scouts brought word of the advance of Polaris with the most of his force through the principal pass. He, too, had sent out small parties to explore through the outer defiles, of which there were four, and bring him word of the lay of the land.

"Now let him come on," counseled Broddok to the Maeronican commander, "and we shall have a surprise for him."

Swiftly galloping riders at once swarmed into the four smaller passes, overwhelmed the Rutharians whom they found there and drove them into the hills. The horsemen then joined forces and swept down the road in the rear of Polaris, having come into the defile by bridle paths over the hills which were known to them.

Turning his front to meet this menace, the son of the snows was beset from behind by both cavalry and infantry, and his force was split up before it could be massed or a place be found suitable for defense. With nearly a thousand of his men of mixed armament, Janess had been driven into the glen, discovering too late that it was a cul-de-sac, from which there was no escape.

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Four charges the Rutharians had met, and their numbers were now less than three hundred. But Jastla's ring of steel still held, and Polaris himself was not even wounded. Where the fighting had been the thickest, there he had gone; but ever when some perilous blow fell, there was one of Jastla's mountaineers to meet it or to die under it. Of the hundred men less than fifty lived, and scarcely a score of those were scatheless.

"All that you can do here, you have done, O king," said Jastla earnestly, as they waited for the fifth charge. "A man unhindered might scale yonder rocks and escape into the hills. Do you make the attempt? I and these with me will hold back these howling whelps of Bel-Ar. Haste you, or 'twill be too late."

Polaris turned on him sternly.

"And you have been comrade to me, Jastla, and did train and make me skilled with arms, and yet think that I am so small of spirit," he said. "Jastla, I take it ill of you. You and these men are fighting for the man whom Ruthar has crowned king. What sort of a king would he be, think you, who deserted when he had those still lines yonder before him for example?" He pointed down where the dead warriors lay.

"Here I may die, and here I may buried be; but I will not turn back."

Under his shaggy brows old Jastla's eyes were moist.

He grunted loudly.

"I didn't think that you would go. Forgive me that I spoke of it," he said. He turned to his hillsmen, and the word went round that every last one of the wolves of Ruthar was to die in his tracks. There would be no giving back before the next charge.

Broddok on foot waved his sword and gave the word, and the Maeronicans raised their battle-cry and came swarming up through the rocks to the attack. The mountaineers answered them with a deep-voiced shout:

"For the king! For Polaris!"

None of the combatants heard a thin cry far above them at the brink of the cliff and the frenzied barking of a dog.

On came the Maeronicans, Broddok leading, his face flushed with triumph and hatred. In the captain's way was a large fragment of rock. As he sprang around it, it split in twain and flew into splinters, belching green flame. That flash was the last thing the captain ever saw; the thunderous roar that shook the hillside was the crack of doom for him. A sliver of rock smote him on the temple. Raula was avenged.

Another terrific explosion tore up the earth and boulders right in the midst of the startled Maeronicans, and then another. Men were dying by the hundred. Bel-Ar's men turned and fled shrieking for the roadway. The charge was turned into a rout. Hardly were they out of the glen where such fearsome happenings had befallen them, when a cloud of Rutharian cavalry rolled down through the main pass and swept Bel-Ar's men and their supports into headlong flight toward the lowlands.

On the brow of the rock a small, white-haired old man, clad in armor several sizes too large for him, stood up from his knees and patted a great black dog on the head.

"Good shots those were, Rombar," he said. "Used to be a baseball pitcher once, and haven't lost my wing yet. By golly! I was just in time."

Presently Zenas was down in the road with the others to greet Polaris. The geologist made light of what he had done, but Janess and the others knew that they owed their lives to his quick wit.

Soldiers who had been driven into the hills had met the Rutharian riders and told them of the plight of their king. While the cavalry engaged the Maeronicans in the pass and cleared it, the old man and a small party, carrying melinite bombs, some few of which Zenas had fashioned in his laboratories, had ridden by a bridle-path to the top of the cliff.

"Be careful, son," said Zenas, when Polaris threw an arm lovingly across his shoulder. "This chain jerkin of mine is packed with enough of that green hell-cake to spread us over two counties. And keep the brute away."

For Rombar had found his master and was leaping about him like a crazed thing and barking as if to tell the whole army about it.

DESPITE the utmost efforts of Fanaer, the most trusted of Bel-Ar's captains and a general skilled in all the arts of war, Ruthar held the isthmus and the mountain passes, and through the Kimbrian defile poured down with horse and foot and chariot into upper Maeronica. Failing to hold back the host of the invader and fortify the passes, as he had hoped to do, Fanaer began a harrying, guerrilla warfare. From sea to sea he made the land barren of supplies for his enemy, sending the peasants and hill-dwellers with their cattle

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and provisions down to the coast cities of Zeddar and Aklon. He sent swarms of light riders into the hills, where by sally and ambuscade and the breaking of bridges and a hundred other means they fretted the advance of the Rutharian army.

Did the way lie through a forest, Fanaer fired it, and Ruthar marched in flames and smoke. Did the road follow the turn of a hill, there were men at the crest to roll huge rocks down on the tramping legions. Was a gorge to be passed, the bridges were ruined.

Days wore away, days which Ruthar could ill spare, and which Polaris counted with a sinking heart, seeing his army go forward so slowly. Still it did advance—slowly, painfully, but surely, the steel lines made progress.

Craft against craft Oleric matched with Fanaer. Ruthar had her light horsemen, too. Right and left Oleric sent them into the uplands to clear his path of the stinging pests of Fanaer. Scores of times in a day, on hilltop or in wooded glen, short, fierce engagements were fought, but never a pitched battle. Maeronica was playing for delay. Far behind the shifting screen of Fanaer's operations Bel-Ar and his generals were consolidating the main strength of Maeronica in the lowlands along the river Thebascu.

When hill-riding and skirmishing was done, the generals of both armies knew that the real war would begin—that the issue would be joined and decided on the plains of Nor.

Careful as any general in modern warfare was Oleric with regard to his flanks and rear. Well he knew, did the red captain, that in the slow-moving trains of provisions that crept ceaselessly along the isthmus from Ruthar was the strength of his host in the field. Once that line was cut, Bel-Ar might laugh indeed.

It took many men to keep the rear ways open and man the isthmian passes. On the morning when the Rutharian army writhed forth from the forests like a wounded but tenacious serpent onto the level stretches of the plains of Nor, Oleric had under his banners a scant hundred thousand men. Thirty thousand more warded the rear. Fifty thousand in reserves were massed in the forests and on the isthmus. Twenty thousand were with the slain.

The sun was shining as the host wound out from the gloom of the forests. To right and to left were wooded hills and beyond them the peaks of mountain ranges, blue against the skies. Ahead, the plains, a reach of level land some thirty miles broad from east and west and a score of miles across, were divided by the gleaming, irregular ribbon of the river Thebascu.

In a loop of the river in a camp that was strongly entrenched, for all the haste with which it had been constructed, lay the army of Ad, fresh and unwearied and ready for battle. And it outnumbered the host of Ruthar by nearly two to one. Across the river, down the hundred miles to Adlaz, the Nazanion Road was choked with supply trains and reserves.

Snow still lay in patches in the forest defiles; but the plains were faintly green with a promise of the spring-time. On the trees the buds were swelling. Through a month of wearisome marching Ruthar had come. In less than forty-five days the trumpets would sound from the towers of Adlaz for the Feast of Years.

"Now by her who sits at Flomos," said Oleric to Polaris, as they sat their horses on a hillside and looked across the plains to where the gold and blue standards fluttered, "here will be a battle worth the waiting of all my years."

Somewhat worn with anxiety was the face of the son of the snows; but his eyes were bright and his strength was unimpaired. He, too, was ready.

"Shall we not strike at the nearest point of the river?" he asked, pointing to the west of Bel-Ar's camp. "If we gain the bank of the stream, it will shorten our front, and it seems that we shall not easily be flanked."

Oleric swore that the plan was good, and Ruthar's army began to fight its way across the plain. It could scarcely be said that battle was beginning. All the way through the forests had been one long, unending struggle with Fanaer. Already on the plains cavalry skirmishes were in progress. Now was to come the climax of a month of conflict.

Steadily Ruthar pressed on, and with the fall of night pitched her tents on the plain, her left wing resting on the river below the Maeronican camp. By common consent, the fighting ceased at dusk and the armies rested on their arms. The next day would tell the tale, and they were content to await it. Such was the contour of the land that there was little ground for strategy and juggling of men. This was to be a battle, front to front, with victory to the strongest arms. And though their force was the greater, there was much of doubt

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in the hearts of the men of Ad. Tales had been brought in of the prowess of these mountain warriors.

Other camp gossip had put uneasiness upon the soldiers of Bel-Ar. How, for instance, had the Kimbrian Wall been sundered, if it were not the work of the gods? And the beasts, the mighty red beasts, against which men were as flies. Rumor had told that they had come into Maeronica and would fight in the field against Adlaz. The sun set that night in a sea of fire. Men did not know how to interpret that omen. Was Shamar angered? And if he was, on whose heads would his blows fall on the morrow? The stars shone calm and clear. Ruthar worshiped the stars.

Those and other thoughts caused many a stout Maeronican to shake his head over his campfire. But most of all they feared the beasts.

WARY Oleric had kept Zoar and his herd well to the rear. Never in the march had the amalocs gone forward until the way had been cleared. None of the Maeronican fighting men had set eyes on them. The beasts were Ruthar's strongest hope. If even the thought of them struck terror into the hearts of the Children of Ad, Oleric reasoned that their sudden appearance in battle might be counted upon to produce a panic.

Ruthar would try a tilt against Maeronica, the red captain planned, and if she might would win her battle by force of arms alone. But if the fight should swing against her, then the beasts would be better than an army in reserve. So he bade Zoar camp in the forests, and he surrounded the encampment with a strong guard and cordons of sentries.

In the morning Ruthar's stars paled, and Shamar came up smiling—seeing which the men of Bel-Ar took fresh heart.

Scarcely had the first shafts of light thrust over the mountain-tops when Oleric, from the shadows of the forest, launched a great bolt of cavalry across the plain. Another division which had been moved in the night swept east along the south bank of the river. While the riders of Bel-Ar went out to meet them, the trumpets of the king of Ruthar were sounded in the center of the camp, and long files of men-at-arms crept forth into the dawn behind the screen of dashing horsemen.

In three deep columns Polaris moved his footmen into battle, with lanes between them, into which the cavalry might retire, and through which the charioteers would charge when the time came. Each of the marching columns was tipped with regiments of swiftly moving javelin men, and behind them came the archers, stringing their long bows and singing a lilting chorus as they moved out on the plain.

Mounted on his black stallion, Polaris led the center, riding behind the first ranks of his swordsmen and accompanied by the men of Jastla and some score of the Rutharian zinds, all in full armor. Far to the right rode Oleric the Red. The left was headed by Tarnos, one of the zinds. That post Polaris had offered to old Jastla of the hills, but the chieftain had declined it.

"'Tis a great honor, O king," he said when the proffer was made, and his eyes shone. "But I pray you give it not to me. I would fight at your side. That post will be troublesome enough, as I well know." Jastla grinned broadly. "Give the command to a nobler man."

"There is none nobler, old wolf," Polaris replied. "But have it as you will."

So Tarnos led the left, along the river Thebascu, and Jastla and his ring of steel rode with his king, and he was content.

Midway between the camps, as Oleric had ordered it, the charging horsemen swerved aside, doubled, and, as though in fear, plunged back between the advancing columns. Hard on their flying heels came the shouting riders of Ad. As they came the javelin men cast, and the archers bent bows and loosed a bitter flight from their twanging strings that shrieked among the horsemen like a white drift of blizzard through the mountain trees. Then, before the eyes of the Maeronican riders, the horsemen they pursued were gone; the bowmen and the javelin-throwers melted away; fanwise the heads of the three columns spread out and joined each to each, their front ranks kneeling; and Ruthar received her plunging foemen on an unbroken front of leveled spears.

Fell ruin awaited that splendid charge. Unable to turn back because of the surging squadrons behind them, the foremost ranks were dashed against the grim steel barrier, and went down in a horrible tangle of struggling men and horses.

Into the mêlée, through the lines and over the shoulders of their comrades, leaped the light-armed footmen with their javelins and daggers, and slew hundreds of horses, whose riders fell easy prey to the two-handed blades that now were aloft and busy.

At the rear the Rutharian cavalry formed again, and dashing around the

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flanks of the columns in two flying wedges, closed like nippers behind Bel-Ar's confused squadrons.

First cast in the game had gone to Ruthar. The horsemen of Ad were routed and pushed back—all those who could go. Those that remained were done with fighting.

From the earthen wall of his camp, standing among his golden-armored generals, Bel-Ar saw his cavalry broken and flung back—saw it, and laughed aloud.

"They fight well, these mountain wolves," he said. "But that was the play of children. Now will we send them a taste of the swords of Ad."

Beyond the wall of the camp were massed the legions of the Maeronican heavy infantry, flower of the fighting men of seven cities, the core of which was formed of the garrison of Adlaz itself, fifteen thousand veteran men-at-arms.

Bidding his captains go forward, the king called for his horse.

SOMBER as he had appeared in his dull garments in the midst of his butterfly court, Bel-Ar, among his captains, offered an even greater contrast. He loved the pomp and pride of power, its show and its glitter, but not in his own person. While his generals rode in gold, and the armor of some of them blazed with gems and patterns in orichalcum that made them glow like fireflies in the night, the king wore a simple suit of arms of black steel, plain of design and undecked by any flashing gauds. Only the majesty that dwelt in his pallid face and the fires of his mystic's eyes distinguished him from some humble gentleman of poor estate.

Mounting his war-horse, a gaunt, powerful roan beast of vicious temper, the king, with a number of his favorite captains, rode down the field in the wake of his advancing phalanxes. With them was advanced the blue and gold battle-standard.

Bel-Ar marshaled his legions in wide divisions, each of nearly a thousand men, marching in quadruple lines, and the divisions in such close touch that they might form, when there was need, a solid front. At the wings of the force were stationed the light-armed men and archers. Behind those, two wedge-shaped masses of chariots rolled forth from the camp gates and rumbled across the plain.

At the foot of a gentle dip of the land the Rutharians had met and hurled back the horsemen. There they elected to remain and await the enemy's sterner onset.

On came the shimmering lines of Ad across the meadows now dewed with blood; on with a rattle of drums, a brazen peal of trumpets, the clank and clash of armor mingling with the pounding hoofs on the hard turf, the thumping of chariot-wheels, and the shouted commands of the file leaders—the ancient, many-tongued clamor that stirs the soul of Mars.

Silent and watchful, the men of mountainous Ruthar crouched low behind their shields and waited.

Over the bodies of their dead comrades, over the fallen horses, the phalanxes marched. Then, closing into a living wall, they took the last tangled barrier of corpses with a rush and a shout, and the battle was joined. All across the field echoed the hollow thunder of the meeting shields as the lines closed. Followed a clanging as of a thousand trip-hammers. For now the spears were down and the swords were at work.

Following their custom, the Rutharians cast their shields behind them after the first shock of the onset, and plied their long blades with both hands, making them serve both as swords and bucklers.

On pushed the Maeronican wall under its tossing banners. So fierce was the rush and pressure of those charging thousands that Ruthar's line, strive as her warriors might, was bent backward like a bow. A wild cheering went up from the ranks of Ad when they saw the red standard give back. Gathering themselves again, they swept the mountain legions to the crest of the rise.

Sitting his charger on the slope behind the line of his men-at-arms, Polaris looked down into that hell of combat. Like the unfolding vista of a hideous dream, it seemed to him, which he was powerless to break or to hinder. Yet above the din of the blood-maddened legions the sky was blue and calm, the sun shone bright, and back there in the forests the birds of spring were calling to their mates.

Under his fascinated eyes the line of his warriors bent and came nearer. The red banner of Ruthar—a moment ago it had been planted at the foot of the slope, and now it was almost touching his horse's muzzle! Down there in the field another flag was coming, and with it a company of riders whose armor flashed back the sunlight from plates and shields of burnished gold.

The spell was broken.

Rising in his stirrups, the son of the

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snows drew his two-handed sword from over his shoulder. Among the Maeronican generals his keen eyes had seen a face that he remembered well.

"Zinds of Ruthar!" he cried, his voice ringing above the clamor. "Yonder rides Bel-Ar of Adlaz. Let us go and greet him."

All around him he heard the clinking of closing vizors. The zinds were ready.

Casting down his shield, Polaris called to the swordsmen in front to open and make way. Before the Maeronican soldiery could advantage themselves of the gap, he was down the slope and upon them like a living thunderbolt. Under the urge of the spurs, his horse reared and struck out with its forefeet as it met the foemen. Leaning well over the good beast's shoulder, the rider whirled his heavy blade and struck so fast and so fiercely that eyes could not follow the blows. Adlaz's stoutest warriors shrank bewildered from the menace of that lightning-stroke and those steel-shod hoofs. Before one might count ten he was through them, leaving a wake of crumpled men. Behind him rode gray Jastla and the zinds of Ruthar.

As they passed, one of the zinds bent and snatched the crimson banner from the standard-bearer.

A roar like that of angry lions went down the Rutharian front when the hillsmen saw their flaming standard rise over the heads of the fighting men and advance into the field. Where their king led, no wall of steel could hold them back. As though the string had been released, the mighty bow straightened. All down that long, grim battle-line the two-handed swords clove through.

Rallying around their king, the golden captains waited the shock that was coming.

For Polaris had one goal, and one only, on all that stricken field. Outstripping the fleetest of his riders, he hewed his way through the Maeronican nobles, nor stopped until his sable war-horse was shoulder to shoulder with the steed of Bel-Ar, the king.

"By Shamar, 'tis the slave-king!" shouted Bel-Ar, as the apparition in steel and silver burst through his gilded riders and bore down upon him. Sword and shield he lifted to meet the assault, fending himself with that skill of arms by which he oft had made good the boast of Adlaz that he was the hardiest fighting man in the two kingdoms.

While the battle on the plain raged around them unheeded, king met king in the play of swords.

First stroke of Polaris fell on the rounded shield and beat it down so that Bel-Ar reeled in his saddle. Before the great blade could swing again, the Maeronican straightened and smote with his own good sword of tempered bronze. A clang as of a descending hammer rang in the ears of Polaris. Under the trampling feet of the horses lay one of the golden wings of his helmet. Another stroke fell on his shoulder, cracking a steel boss of his armor and thrilling his arm with a sting of pain. Heeding it not, he rose in the saddle and swung his sword to his two arms' height. No shield or arm would stay that blow.

For the fraction of a second Bel-Ar's doom hung poised in air. Ere it fell, Polaris's stallion reared, screaming. The mighty stroke that the rider sped fell on empty air. Overbalanced by the weight of his own effort, Polaris bent nearly to his saddle-bow. Beneath him the black stallion shuddered and went down. An unhorsed captain of Adlaz had run in and thrust the animal through the vitals with a spear.

Janess sprang free from the falling horse. Above him, Bel-Ar shouted in triumph and hewed down with his bronze sword. But the zinds of Ruthar had torn through Bel-Ar's riders to the support of their king, upsetting both men and horses as they came. One of them, a slender youth in silver armor, leaped from his steed and flashed between Bel-Ar and his dismounted and helpless foeman, taking the king's sword-stroke on his head.

Jastla closed his steel ring, then, and Bel-Ar was carried away in a swirling press of his own cavalry, which had charged fiercely in to save him.

POLARIS knelt beside his fallen horse and lifted the still form of the man who had saved him. The red banner of Ruthar, held by Zind Albar, floated above them. Around the circle of riders which Jastla had drawn the battle whirled like a seething maelstrom around a rock in a sea of clashing steel.

"Who is he?" Polaris asked of Albar, and pillowed the head in its silver helm on his knee. In vain he tried to lift the vizor. The sword-stroke of the Maeronican king had shattered the upper flare of the helmet and bent down its crest so that the vizor would not yield.

"I know him not," said Albar, who was a hillsman. "Some zind of the lower cities, I judge, from the armor he wears. Whoever he is, he is a brave man. He has

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this day saved the life of the king of Ruthar, and I fear that he has lost his own in the deed. Bel-Ar strikes bitterly. See; he has cracked the helmet like an egg. Ah-h—!"

Striking the steel-shod shaft of the standard into the earth, Albar leaped down from his horse and knelt beside Polaris.

While the zind had been speaking, the fingers of the son of the snows had loosed the clasps of the helmet and lifted it. From under the cloven silver shell rippling coils of red-brown hair slipped down and flowed over his arm and his knee, where the sunlight caught and turned them into dancing flames. The pale face turned up to the sky, unmarred save by a small stain of blood at one of the temples, was that of the Goddess Glorian of Ruthar!

Janess groaned. Albar stared like a man transfixed. But Glorian was not dead. As the air struck her face she moved her head faintly and her lips trembled.

"Illia—roars—loudly to-day," she murmured. "It must be—the freshets—of spring."

She opened her eyes, saw the faces bent above her, and smiled wanly at Polaris.

"Then I was not too late?" she said, the halting gone out of her voice. "'Tis well."

"Lady, why did you come hither—into the battle?" asked Polaris. "And why—" His voice broke; for the courage of this woman moved him almost to tears; the memory of that crushing stroke of bronze which she had taken in his stead made him shudder.

Glorian smiled again.

"Vex yourself not about me," she said. "Shall Ruthar's bravest shed their lives for their land and king, and Glorian not do her part?" She lifted her hand and pointed to the standard. "Where Ruthar's banner goes, there goes Glorian also—even into the battle. And I am not dying, or greatly hurt, only dizzied, and my head hums. See; I can arise."

And arise she did, with Polaris's arm to support her. Around Jastla's narrowing circle broke the shock of the battle-tide. But for the moment neither the man nor the woman heeded it.

"But you are wounded, lady," Janess said. "There is blood on your forehead."

She slipped a hand from its gauntlet and raised it to her head.

"Hardly a scratch," she said.

Just at the roots of her long tresses a splinter from the shivered helmet had scarred the scalp—a tiny cut, scarcely a quarter of an inch in length.

Now Albar the zind, who had hung on every word, came out of the spell of horror that had bound him. He swung himself onto his horse. Then for the one time in his life Albar gave orders to a king.

"Guard you the goddess and the banner," he cried to Polaris. "I go to tell the men of Ruthar that which shall put in each one the strength of ten!"

He rode to Jastla's side.

"Gray wolf, may your ring be strong till I come again," he said. "You have within it a king and a goddess."

Down rang his vizor, and setting spurs to his horse Albar set out to cross the field and find Oleric the Red.

No longer was the fight on the plains one of ordered lines of men. The charge of Polaris had broken the Maeronicans' long front, and they had not been able to close up the gap he had made. So they had swung into the smaller phalanxes of their legions, and the battle was one of division against division, with many breaks between. Here and there the divisions had split up into still smaller groups, and occasionally there might be seen two warriors who fought alone, one laying on for Ruthar and one for Ad.

Gray Jastla, fighting with his face to the west, heard Albar's words as the zind flashed past him. To find their meaning, the chieftain cast a hurried glance over his shoulder. He saw Polaris and Glorian standing together under the crimson standard, and was near to letting his sword fall in his surprise. Next instant he rose in his stirrups and clove a Maeronican from shoulder to breastbone. Out rang the chief's voice in a hollow roar through his vizor:

"Strike as ye never struck before! Behind you is the Goddess Glorian, come to see that ye do well. Would ye have these Maeronican hounds take her? Strike!"

Around the circle echoed the war-cry:

"For the Goddess Glorian! Strike!"

Like living sword-blades did the Ruthar zinds answer that fierce appeal. The circle grew smaller and drew in upon itself, but it did not break. Under their resistless blades the zinds piled a rampart of dead Maeronicans to defend their goddess. A riderless horse backed into the circle, and Polaris, quitting Glorian's side, mounted the steed with his two-handed steel and joined the zinds.

STANDING up on the body of Polaris's fallen war-horse, supporting herself with one hand on the staff of the banner,

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Glorian watched that deadly fray. With her long hair flowing on her shoulders, she looked in her warlike gear like one of the valkyries of Adin come down to earth from Valhalla to watch the passing of the souls of heroes. Ever her gaze followed Polaris. And if she seemed like one of the Norse god's daughters, the man who fought under her eyes was a fitting part of the simile.

His sword wrenched from his grasp in the body of a man he had slain, he snatched the heavy ax that swung at his saddle-bow, and with it laid on like Thor with his hammer.

Aid was coming.

Down the field as he rode Albar spread the tidings. From mouth to mouth flew the word that the Goddess Glorian was on the plains of Nor, and that she and the king were in sore peril yonder where the red standard flew. The effect was instantaneous. Each warrior became a host in himself. Wounded men who had turned to the rear heard and forgot their hurts and staggered into the fight again.

When Albar reached Oleric the Red on the right, the zind found that his news had preceded him.

"Get you to Maxtan," shouted Oleric. "Charge with every horse that can bear a rider. A messenger has gone into the forests, and another charge is coming. Clear the way for the amalocs."

Maxtan and Albar gathered their wild horsemen and charged and charged again. So well did they do their work that they hacked a way to the first rank of the Maeronican chariots, deep between the two horns of which was waging the struggle around the red banner.

Vainly Oleric urged his own charioteers forward. Bel-Ar's blood was up, and he was smiling no longer. Battalion on battalion of his infantry he sent in to meet the steeds and feed the blades of Ruthar. Almost within his grasp the Maeronican king saw victory. Already he counted as taken the slave whom his foeman had crowned. Sooner than give back a foot, or allow that little band of riders to go free, he was prepared to spend his army to the last man, and himself with it.

No less than three horses Oleric had killed under him. When the last was gone, he climbed into a chariot and fought at the point of his rumbling wedge. Behind him from the forests a force entered the plain and the conflict that was mightier than all the red captain's horsemen and battalions.

Zoar had come.

In the shadow of the tall trees where the bending limbs swept their mighty backs, Zoar marshaled thirty of his amalocs and set them in battle array—a single line, with twenty intervening feet between each beast. If Zoar knew aught of amalocs, and he thought that he did, there would be need for no second line. A hundred men and as many horses ran about the legs of the monsters, tightening the broad girths that held the basketlike turrets on the mammoths' shoulders. The beasts stood quietly, swinging their huge trunks and weaving from side to side, as was their habit. Occasionally one of them cocked forward a great blanket of an ear as though in lazy wonderment at the din on the plains.

On the head of each, with his back to the turret, and clutching his keen-pointed ankus, sat a driver in full armor.

When all was ready, the spear-throwers and archers clambered up by rope-ladders and took their places in the towers.

At the left of the line, and nearest to the river, was Ixstus, patriarch and giant of the herd. And on the broad head of Ixstus beside the driver rode Zoar of the many years.

Along the line from beast to beast passed the word:

"We are ready, Father Zoar."

"Ixstus!" said the old man. The sail-like ears gave attention. "Ixstus, I have raised you since a calf, and I think you love me after your fashion. Do not fail me now, Ixstus. Go forward, fearing nothing. *Akko dor!*"

Zoar's last words were spoken loudly. Thirty vast trunks lifted up. From thirty huge proboscides pealed forth the amaloc trumpet-call—such a call as might have shaken the forests in the ages before the first puny man began his life of fear.

For of amalocs the records of the Garden of Eden make no mention.

Swaying their ponderous heads, and with the turrets on their shoulders heaving and tossing like boats on a troubled sea, the amalocs went forward.

Far in the turmoil of the fight Oleric heard that trumpeting. Over his shoulder he looked and saw the mighty red bulk of Ixstus push out from among the trees.

With their trunks curled out of harm's way, their thick and ropy tails stretched straight out behind, and their ears flapping to their stride, the amalocs came down the grim lanes of battle. Though the

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legs that were as the trunks of trees for size swung with no apparent haste, the beasts came on at a pace that it would have troubled a trotting horse to distance. The lengths of chain fastened to their knee-harness whistled through the air like flails.

From division to division along Ruthar's jagged battle-line sped the warning cry:

"Way! Way for Zoar! Make way for the amalocs!"

Under the tossing ivory fronts the divisions parted and drew aside. Zoar increased the distance between his beasts. Into thirty wide aisles the army split. From forest to front, save for the dead, the way was clear. From the wild vortex of the battle rose a stormy burst of cheering as the amalocs thundered down the aisles, and Ruthar's exultant warriors welcomed their gigantic allies.

Wilder still was the cheering when it was seen that at the ends of the pathways the phalanxes of Bel-Ar's men-at-arms were crumbling away. Flesh and blood could not abide the onset that was coming, and the Maeronican legions broke and fled ingloriously across the plains in droves, many of them casting away their arms and shields as they ran.

Bidding his charioteer pull in his horses, Oleric climbed up on the high front of his chariot to watch how Bel-Ar would meet this new stroke. What would meet the drive of the amalocs? As he reached his vantage-point, the answer came—a cavalry charge!

From the wall of his camp, where he had been taken, nursing an arm that was numb from wrist to shoulder, the Maeronican king ground his teeth in fury as he saw the new force enter the battle and witnessed the melting of his legions. Once before, in the morning, his cavalry had been rudely handled, and he had laughed. Now, with tears of rage in his eyes, he dispatched his shattered squadrons in the teeth of the oncoming peril.

White-faced captains and quaking men scrambled into their saddles to do their king's bidding, and the horsemen rode desperately to meet the beasts.

What happened was simple. The amalocs plowed through the clouds of cavalry that opposed them with scarcely a break in their stride, overthrowing men and horses as though they had been of paper, and leaving ghastly ruins behind them where their ponderous feet had trodden.

One such onset was enough. No horse that ever lived could have been forced to face another. For the amalocs, when they joined battle, set up such a din of squealing and trumpeting as nearly split the ears that heard it. The horse that could have met that grievous onslaught must have been both blind and deaf.

From above, in the basket-turrets, the archers and spearsmen poured down a deadly hail of missiles on the riders. Did a horseman avoid the thrashing chains and get near enough to the vast side of an amaloc to strike—and not many did so—he found his spear-point rebound from the tough hide. The utmost power of his stroke was not a pin-prick to an amaloc. Even as the swordsmen had fled, so fled now the riders, betaking themselves in a fear-maddened stream to their camp, whither the charioteers had preceded them.

"The beasts of Ruthar are a myth," had said Bel-Ar, the king. And his soldiers had believed him, had fostered confidence with the thought that the frightful tales that had been told of the strength and fury of the amalocs were mere traditions which had come down from the days of old. Now here before the camp were the beasts, red and awesome and raging—more terrible by far than even tradition had painted them—and among the Children of Ad there was none who had the heart to go out and face them—unless, indeed, it were the king himself. Bel-Ar in his rage would have fronted the overlord of all evil that day had he come against him.

So it came about that the ring of Jastla, the chief, found the pressure of assault slackening and falling away. Maeronicans who had been fiercest to meet the sword-blades, now were stumbling over each other's legs in their haste to escape the amalocs. What was left of the ring—barely a score and five of battered men and horses—opened, and through its gap strode Ixstus and paused beside the red banner.

CHAPTER X

THE GODDESS GLORIAN'S DECREE

ZOAR quit the straps where he had held and stood on the head of Ixstus. A triumph shone in the eyes of the master of the amalocs, and a smile spread over his mummified old-ivory features as he looked down at Glorian.

"Daughter, they told me that I would find you here—in the forefront of the battle," he said. "And so it is. Your zeal for Ruthar has carried you far—so far that

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Oleric the Learned could not follow, and sent Father Zoar to find you." He laughed in his bell-like tones.

"But for the King of Ruthar and these brave men here, you would have had a longer journey, Father Zoar," Glorian replied. "It might have been to the camp of Bel-Ar yonder, or—to the stars. Take me up with you, Zoar, for I am weary."

"Stekkar deen!" commanded Zoar, and Ixstus looped his trunk and swung Glorian gently to a seat beside his master.

Glorian looked around at the little circle of wearied men—so wearied that they reeled in their saddles. She looked at those others, who lay where they had fallen, and to whom the long rest had come. Her eyes filled with tears.

"I thought to thank you," she said, "but I find no words splendid enough."

Old Jastla lifted his arm in salute. "Lady, to those of us who live, it is sufficient to know that you live also. Those who are dead, died gladly to make it so. We have held our goddess safe, and our king has held himself." And he turned and saluted Polaris.

Of the hundred zinds and fifty tall hillsmen who had formed in Jastla's ring, five and twenty were left. Not one was unwounded. Jastla's beard was red with blood, where a spear-point had penetrated through the bars of his vizor and torn his mouth. In addition to the bruised and stiffening shoulder caused by the blow of Bel-Ar that had broken his armor, Polaris had been gashed on the cheek by an arrow. Otherwise he was the least harmed of the party.

It was midafternoon when Ixstus set foot in the circle. Presently Oleric arrived in his chariot. Behind him came the host of Ruthar—weary and with many of its battalions sadly thinned, but still a host, and ready to go on if need be.

Another amaloc rolled up alongside of Ixstus. Over the edge of the wicker basket it bore, a white old head bobbed up with the suddenness of a jack-in-the box.

"Hey, son," said Zenas Wright to Polaris, "will you never quit your foolhardy ways? Look what you have made me do—come a-hunting you, riding on the back of one of these animated stacks of red hay, that should have been dead and fossilized six thousand years ago. Well, well; we've given his majesty Bel-Ar a bellyful, I'm thinking." Out of his basket and down the rope-ladder Zenas clambered to shake Polaris by the hand.

"Oh, boy," the geologist said, "you're a better king than those heathen will see again, if they all live to be as old as Father Methuselah yonder says he is. But be careful, lad, be careful."

On the head of Ixstus the Goddess Glorian stood and pointed toward the camp of Bel-Ar, and her beautiful face grew stern.

"There are still three hours of daylight, Father Zoar," she said. "Let us go and finish what we have begun."

"As well now as ever, daughter," Zoar replied. "I am minded to teach this Maeronican king a lesson that shall become a tradition in the land. What passes in the camp? My eyes are too dim to see."

"Confusion, father, and the running to and fro of many men. They are adding to the height of their earthen walls. They are piling their gateways with timbers and the fragments of broken chariots."

Zoar laughed. "Think they with walls of mud to stop my amalocs?" he muttered. He lifted his voice, and word was passed down the line that the beasts were to be advanced against the camp.

Under the orders of Polaris, the dead zinds and men of his guard were borne off the field, and those who were still living, but wounded, were carried tenderly to the rear. When he learned that the amalocs were to attack the camp, he climbed with Zenas to the turret which the geologist had occupied. Jastla and the others he urged to seek rest. But they were men of great spirit, and only one or two of them went. The most of them sent for fresh horses, determined to see the fighting through to its end.

At a word from Glorian, Jastla took up the war-standard of Ruthar and passed it to the fighting-men of Zoar, who set it fast in the wicker tower on the back of Ixstus. Glorian caught its floating folds and kissed it.

"Now Ixstus bears our banner. Who shall withstand it?" she said.

A blare of trumpets, a ruffle of drums, sounded the advance of Ruthar. Louder and above all arose the roar of the thirty amalocs, strident and deafening, as the shaggy, red line surged forward.

In the camp of Bel-Ar that call found answer in the howl of hate and terror that went up from the ranks of the Maeronicans when they saw that their terrible foes were coming.

"Fire!" shouted Bel-Ar to his generals. "We must meet and turn the beasts with fire! Man the walls with torches and set a blaze before each gate."

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Bel-Ar had pitched his encampment in a loop of the River Thebascu, a broad, swift stream, now swollen by the spring freshets into a dun-colored torrent. From bank to bank across the loop, the soldiers had constructed a wall of earth and stones, ten feet high, and pierced by six wide gateways, wherein were set heavy gates of steel and oak. Inside the line of the outer wall, with some fifty feet of space intervening, was another rampart, also of earth, and a few feet higher than the first. Outside of the works the camp was protected further by a semicircular ditch, or moat, spanned at each of the gateways by a solid bridge of timbers. The Maeronican engineers had turned the waters of the river into the moat and filled it level full. At the rear of the camp was the crossing of the Thebascu—three wide bridges of stone, which had been built in the long ago.

WHEN they saw the advance of the amalocs, soldiers swarmed from the camp with ropes and horses, and strove to pull the timber bridges away from the ditch. But the weight of the passing and repassing of the army had sunk the beams into the earth so deeply that they could not be stirred. Failing in that attempt, the Maeronicans piled débris on the floors of the bridges and set fire to it, hoping to burn away the approaches. That, too was a failure. The water of the moat, nearly level with the side-beams, was ankle-deep on the bridge-floors, and had soaked the timbers so that they would not catch from the fires.

As Zoar and his monsters came to the moat, the men of Bel-Ar shot at them with arrows, stones, and javelins. But Ruthar could play that game, too. Oleric lined the ditch between the bridges with slingers and archers, who kept up so thick a bombardment that they killed many men, and soon drove the Maeronicans to the shelter of their walls. As they went in, Bel-Ar's men touched flames to the piles of timbers and wrecked chariots before their gateways and closed their gates.

"Shall we cross the bridges and clear the way, Father Zoar?" asked Oleric.

"Nay," the master of the beasts replied, 'that would be at the expense of many men, and yon is an ill place to fight in. Methinks I know a better plan."

Under his directions, his foresters ungirthed one of the mammoths and took from its back the wicker turret. Zoar called the driver of the beast to him. Whatever it was that the old man said, the amaloc-driver blanched somewhat at the words. He cast a quick glance toward the armed camp, and under his swarthy skin his face turned pale. Then he drew himself up proudly, saluted, and went back to his beast.

Clambering to his perch, the man found and pulled two small chains connected with the armored plates which protected the skull of his ponderous steed. These drew into place and closed fast two small doors, or lids, cunningly wrought of steel, and devised to cover the eyes of the beast. So blinded, the heart within the vast bulk became uneasy, and the mammoth began to back and sway, groping before it with its trunk.

While the army stood breathless to see what he would do, the driver struck with his ankus, and with a shout launched the amaloc straight at the center gate of the camp.

Deprived of its eyesight, the mammoth obeyed the superior will expressed by the voice that it knew and loved. Across the bridge, where ordinarily it would have paused and tested the timbers carefully before trusting its immense bulk upon them, it now charged blindly, trumpeting as it went.

Showers of missiles from the camp of Ad fell on the beast; ahead of it roared the blazing pile. It screamed out with pain and terror when the flames touched it, but it did not stop. Scattering the burning tangle like fiery chaff, it tore on, and its armored frontlet clanged on the bars of the gateway.

That shock tore the gates from their hinges and brought the amaloc to its knees. For an instant it knelt on the fallen gate, then, trumpeting with rage, rose up and danced on the ruin.

On the head of the beast the driver lay flat on his belly, his arms and legs thrust under the leather bands placed there to hold him. Ahead, scarcely fifty feet away, was the second gateway. With voice and steel the man urged the amaloc on, and it crashed through that gate as it had through the first, and plunged into the center of the Maeronican camp.

Began then a mad rout for safety. No one thought of fighting the terror that had come among them; but each man for himself ran for the river, casting away anything that might weight down his legs. Soon all three bridges of the Thebascu were black with a horrid, writhing mêlée—a tangle of fear-maddened men, cursing and striking at each other for way, and

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screaming, terrified horses. Many soldiers, unable to fight into the jams on the bridges, threw themselves into the swift stream with all their armor on, and some swam across and others were seen no more.

To and fro through the encampment raged the now thoroughly crazed amaloc, sundering and crushing all that it met. The long, red wool had caught fire from the blaze at the gateway and burned fiercely up over its shoulders. Wild with the pain of it, the beast ran hither and thither, seeking to escape from the flames. A two-horsed chariot was in its path at one moment. It scooped it up like a toy and carried it forward on its mighty tusks, the horses dangling in their harness. Then with a heave of its vast shoulders the monster cast the wreck in the air. Lying on his face, the driver closed his eyes and prayed wildly to his stars.

At length, smelling the water of the river, the amaloc turned thither, to quench its agonies in the rushing stream. On it drove, across the camp, upsetting everything in its way. It reached the river to the left of one of the bridges. In its path a horse bearing a steel-clad rider slipped and fell. The groping trunk that sought the water found the man, plucked him from the ground, whirled him aloft, and dashed him against an abutment of the bridge so that his armor cracked like a nutshell and his blood ran down the stones.

With a final shriek of fury, the amaloc plunged into the river. The waters closed over its upthrown trunk, and its mad career was ended. With it went the driver, well content to give his life for Ruthar.

This one beast in the outpouring of its majestic strength had done more to shatter the power of Adlaz than had the legions of Ruthar in a month's fighting.

SOON after the death of the amaloc, night fell swiftly across the plains of Nor. The other beasts of Zoar, made uneasy by the experiences through which they had passed, and stirred by the screaming of their flame-maddened comrade, were in such a state that their master deemed it unwise to attempt to urge them farther in the darkness and against the fires. So he drove them back to the forest, and Ruthar camped on the plain.

In the night was heard a clamor as of men who fought on the other side of the Thebascu, and when morning came it was seen that the host of Bel-Ar was divided. The royal standards waved over the bridge-heads at the crossing of the river. Farther down the stream, and opposite to the camp of Ruthar was gathered by far the greater part of the Maeronican host.

When the dawn was full, a boat crossed the river, bearing messengers to Ruthar from the lords of the six cities which had fought for Adlaz. These heralds came to Oleric and asked what terms he would make them.

"For," said they, "did we have to fight with men only, we would stand firm until the end, and with our united power sweep Ruthar from the field and crush her. But against such as the great beasts no men may war."

The red captain referred them to the king of Ruthar for their answer. Polaris bade them go back to the lords of the cities and say that he wished to make war on none save Adlaz and the king thereof—but that war he would wage until the death or the submission of Bel-Ar.

"Our lords will not join ye in war against Adlaz," said one of the heralds hastily. "We be not such traitors; but our soldiers will bear arms against the terrible beasts no more."

"Ruthar asks no help in her warfare against Bel-Ar," Polaris replied. "Take your armies to their homes in peace."

That answer satisfied the lords of the cities, and they sent word that so they would do; and if Polaris in the end prevailed against Adlaz, they would bend the knee to his rule. Secretly they hoped that he would win. Bel-Ar had been a hard master, and those who had seen the tawny-haired king of Ruthar deemed him to be the better man to serve, outlander though he was.

So that host was dispersed and went its various ways homeward. The soldiers of Adlaz and the levies from the lands around the city were of a different kidney. To a man they stood firm for their king. Beasts or no beasts, they swore, they would die for him, did he wish it.

It seemed likely that their promise would be required of them. Bel-Ar, stubborn and high of spirit, was resolved to fight on. He still mustered under his banners a force of nearly sixty thousand men, veterans of his former wars and the flower of the fighting-men of the land. Besides, he held the advantage of position.

When Ruthar would have gone on against him in the morning, it was found that his engineers, working through the night, had piled the bridge-heads with barricades

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of stones, so thick and high that no amaloc charge would beat them down. Behind those barriers the Maeronican generals reorganized their broken forces and sent in the front fresh soldiers drawn from the reserves that were waiting along the Mazanion Road.

Not for many weary miles was there another crossing of the Thebascu—if, indeed, there were any on the course of the river where were bridges strong enough to support an army and the weight of the amalocs.

Taking counsel together, Polaris and Oleric and their generals decided that they must hammer their way through at the three bridges. They might have blown up the barriers with melinite; but they dared not, for fear of destroying the structures of the bridges also; and they had not the time to build new bridges. Only a sustained frontal attack, at the cost of many men, would clear the way.

For a score and ten days and nights the furious struggle was waged at the Thebascu. Then one of the bridges was taken. Polaris, his great frame grown gaunt from continual fighting, and his face sunken and haggard with anxiety and loss of sleep, saw through hollow and burning eyes his hosts swing across the river and into the Mazanion Road.

Fourteen days were left him, and then—the Feast of Years, and the end.

Summer was coming, and with it the feast of the return of Shamar, that could not be set forward or delayed. Though the foe were hammering at its gates, Oleric said, the feast would be held in the city. Such was the ancient law laid down in the early days of Adlaz.

On the Mazanion Road they found the captain Fanaer once more, tireless and vengeful. As he had harried them all the way from the isthmian passes to the plains of Nor, so he harried them now. Every foot of the hundred miles down the Mazanion Road he fought them, and with him fought Bel-Ar, his master. Wall after wall they built and lost.

It was not until afternoon of the last day that the Rutharian vanguard, so worn with battle that it staggered as it rode, broke through the final barrier and marched through the gorgeous suburban estates to the wall of Adlaz. Under the leadership of Fanaer, the remnant of Bel-Ar's army made a last desperate stand, but was swept away.

As night came on, the Maeronican king, broken-hearted, but still defiant, entered his city and closed his gates—there to sit down and wait for the coming of the Goddess Glorian.

IT WAS nine o'clock of a morning—the morning of the third day of the Maeronican month of Kanar, corresponding to the fifteenth of November; or, to reverse the seasons to the terms of our northern clime, the sixteenth of May. A man who bore a heavy heart within his golden armor faced a white-faced maid in the ancient audience-hall of the dead king Bel-Tisam.

"Now am I in my heart almost a traitor to my king and land, lady," Brunar said. "For I have almost wished that your lover might prevail over Bel-Ar and save you. But the day has come and the time is at hand, and Ruthar is still without the walls. Would that I might save you, lady—I think that to do so I would willingly give my life. But Shamar's servants have watched this place by day and by night. It cannot be. Already they wait for you without the doors to lead you to the temple."

For an instant the girl's eyes swam with terror. She gazed hither and yon about the hall like a hunted thing. Then the heritage of her northern race came to her aid and saved her from collapse.

Bravely she faced and spoke to the captain.

She stepped to the cradle of the little Patrymion and kissed the babe.

"I am ready," she said, then.

At the doors of the prison a chariot waited, and with it were four of the white-robed priests of Shamar. The girl was lifted into the car. The charioteer drove up the side avenue of Chedar's Flight, past the Place of Games, now standing empty and silent, to the grounds of the Temple of the Sun. They saw many armed men in the street as they passed along. As they entered the gateway of the temple grounds they heard a dull booming that beat up with the wind from the south, where Ruthar hammered at the Mazanion gates.

The priests carried the girl up the hundred white marble steps to the western entrance to the temple and through the splendid arch of a doorway that was fifty feet from pave to vault. Within all was dim twilight, except in the mighty dome, two hundred feet aloft. There it was light, indeed.

At the doorway the party halted, and two soldiers shackled Rose with fetters of heavy gold at her wrists and ankles. Around her waist they set a girdle of the same yellow metal, to which chains were

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attached. That done, they placed a gag in her mouth and led her into the temple.

Here was a place of wonders, such as had its like nowhere in the world. All around the hall, supporting the ring of masonry on which the dome rested, were magnificent pillars of marble. The circle of the pavement which was enclosed by the pillars, and which was nearly a hundred feet across, was bare, except at its center. There an oblong slab of black basalt lay from west to east across the gleaming white floor. That block was the height of a man's waist from the pavement, some six feet across, and at least ten yards in length.

On one end of the slab, that which pointed west, stood a solid column of orichalcum, more than a yard in diameter and fifteen feet tall, its whole substance glowing in the half-light like a pillar of lambent flame. From base to top the surface of this marvelous plinth was carved with Maeronican characters and mystic signs. It was the ancient Column of Laws, whereon was written the prophecy of the future dominion of Adlaz over all the world.

Over across from the fiery pillar, at the other extremity of the slab, was a vase, cut out of solid rock-crystal, as tall as a man, but slenderly fashioned, and as fragile in structure as thin-blown glass.

This basalt block, with its gleaming column and crystal vase, was the altar of Shamar.

Though the light was dim in the hall below, high in the arch of the dome was a dazzling play of light and colors. Through prismatic windows the rays of the sun poured and were translated into all of the changing hues of the spectrum, and as the prisms were turned by a concealed mechanism operated from below, the multiplying and shifting color-shafts, reflected back from the marble walls, combined into a bewildering and fairy display.

Seated in a stone chair at the foot of one of the pillars in the northern arc of the circle was Bel-Ar. He was in full armor of black steel. His pallid face made a ghastly patch in the dusk. Except for the large, glowing eyes, it might have been taken for the face of a dead man. Back of the king, filling in the spaces between the pillars with silent rows of bronze, were the five companies of the palace-guard.

IMMEDIATELY upon the arrival of the girl the ceremonies were opened. Followed by a train of his priests, chanting a deep-voiced hymn of praise, the arch-priest of Shamar, the aged Rhaen, entered the hall through the western portals. Thrice the procession of singing, white-robed attendants of the god passed around the circle within the pillars. Then they massed themselves in the space to the south of the altar. Rhaen retired, to come forth again, clad in a surplice of pale blue, and with a tall cap of the same color atop of his white locks. As he passed Rose, she fancied that she saw a frightened look in his keen old hawk's eyes.

Four men brought in the head of one of the sacred bulls, freshly slain in the court-yard.

This gory trophy was laid on the altar, a few feet from the crystal vase.

At a command from Rhaen, a company of the priests bore the struggling form of a man from behind the pillars and proceeded to chain him down on the basalt slab near its center. He was fettered and gagged; but even so trussed up, he fought frantically, giving the priests much trouble before they had him chained in such a fashion that he could scarcely move a limb.

Now came the turn of Rose.

As the priests bore her to the altar and lifted her, she saw that the man who lay there was Ensign Brooks, of the *Minnetonka*. He had been fetched from the mines by order of Rhaen to take the place of Everson. When the girl saw the young sailor, chubby and cheerful no longer, but worn to skin and bones, and with eyes that glared in their sockets, she would have cried out in horror and pity—for to the last she thought not of herself—but she was gagged and helpless to utter one word of comfort.

Brooks saw her as she was borne past him, and he struggled terribly. His utmost effort resulted only in a violent shaking of his head.

The servants of Rhaen chained Rose to the rock midway between the sailor and the head of the bull. Aided by his priests, Rhaen clambered onto the rock and took his stand at the foot of the orichalcum pillar. He bent his head in prayer. While his lips moved, the priests knelt on the pavement with lifted hands and upturned faces. Every eye was fixed on the dome. Whatever was to come, it was evident that it would proceed thence.

Lying on the black altar, doomed to be the first sacrifice to Shamar in the Feast of Years, Rose for a time was dazed and near to fainting. Then her mind cleared,

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and a mad whirl of tortured thought began. What of Polaris? With the memory of her lover came a stab of grief so keen that it banished all fear of the priests and what they could do. No pain that they could bring to her body could be so terrible as this anguish that made her very soul quail.

Minutes passed. Again she became calm and fell to studying her surroundings. What manner of doom was coming? Fire in some shape, she was sure. She had noticed that the surface of the basalt slab was deeply scored down its center, where she and Brooks were chained, and its substance was crumbled and calcined as if by the passing of a fierce heat many times repeated. She besought her God that before Shamar struck, her senses might leave her, so might she die in peace.

Rhaen prayed on. Above in the dome the brilliant colors played and shifted. Their magnificence hurt the girl's eyes, and she closed them. Would the end never come? Out in the city the din of war swelled louder.

Bel-Ar spoke harshly, bidding Rhaen delay not. The arch-priest quit his mumbled prayer long enough to reply with some show of spirit that the doings of the god could not be hastened.

The truth of the matter was, Rhaen was proceeding slowly, and with a reason. Rhaen was a politician. He had watched through the long weeks the course of war, and he did not find it hard to guess whose would be the ultimate victory. When that time came, what mercy would the king of Ruthar show to those who had given his lady to the tortures of Shamar? He lifted his hands high above his head, finally, and led his priests in a sonorous chant.

As the notes of the song arose, the prismatic colors ceased in the dome. The prisms disappeared. Doors glided back in the golden roof, and an immense circular plate, or lens, of crystal made its appearance. So high was the arch of the dome where the crystal lens was hung, that it was impossible from the floor to judge its size; but it must have been at least thirty feet in diameter. It was set in a metal rim, and the whole was swung into place by chains, the mechanism doubtless operated by servants of Rhaen concealed in the vault of the dome.

Tilted slightly to the east, the crystal hung. Above it a round aperture suddenly appeared in the roof. Through that opening shot a splendid shaft of sunshine that pierced the gloom of the temple-hall like an arrow of light. Blinding in its radiance, it cut downward and struck on the basalt altar, full on the head of the bull.

Immediately arose the stench of burning hair and sizzling flesh. The power of the crystal lens so condensed the light-ray that where it fell its heat was all-consuming. Within half a minute naught was left of the head of the sacred bull save a few cinders and bits of calcined bone and charred tips of the horns.

Where the head had been, the basalt rock glowed ruby-red in the path of that awful lance of fire. Inch by inch, and very slowly, the consuming ray crept along the altar toward the head of the girl.

Rose had been nearly blinded, even through her closed lids, by the flash of light from the dome. Although she could not turn her head to see, she could smell the scorching flesh of the bull, and could guess what was coming.

"Good-by, my love, good-by," she said in her heart. Then He to whom she had prayed made answer, and she fainted.

Louder rose the chant of the priests. The merciless finger of their god moved on. Bel-Ar strained forward in his stone seat and stared at the sacrifice as though fascinated.

Some five feet were yet to be traversed by the ray before it would reach the girl, when a soldier ran up the southern steps of the temple and hurled himself through the kneeling ranks of the priests. Behind him a wild clamor of battle arose in the street.

"Adlaz is lost!" shouted the soldier, as he broke into the open space before the king. "Already is the foe at the very gates of Shamar!"

Without stirring in his seat, hardly removing his eyes from the altar, Bel-Ar gave an order to the captains behind him. The silent files of the palace-guard came from behind the pillars and ranged themselves before the four entrances of the temple.

Across the face of the altar the relentless fire-beam seared its way.

MEANWHILE, at the walls of Adlaz the Rutharian army had halted.

Night had found the men of the hills battering at the Mazanion gates. Urged on by the tireless energy of Polaris and the equally indomitable zeal of Oleric—for the red captain had made a promise—the zinds mustered their weary legions for a night of sleepless battle. War-worn by a quarter-year's conflict, the echoes of which would

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go whispering down their history for centuries to come, the king's battalions did not fail him. Every man in the army knew the terrible stake that was set for the game. None faltered. None complained.

Assault on assault was directed at the gates, but still the southern doors of Adlaz remained unshaken. Riders had made the round of the city and had reported that the other three gateways had been walled up with stone masonry that it would be a work of days to dislodge—and they had only seventeen hours to reach the temple of Shamar. Oleric, who knew, said that the sacrifice of the Feast of Years would begin at noon of the next day, and not one moment sooner.

Fanaer, Ruthar's most dreaded antagonist, was manning his last barricade. As soon as he had drawn his shattered army within the gates before the advance of his foemen, the captain ordered great rocks, which had been brought to the top of the walls in preparation for his purpose, cast down until they formed a jagged but powerful defense before the gates. That was to keep back the amalocs.

Vainly the infantry of Ruthar charged over that irregular wall. Did any of them reach the gates, their battle-axes were but puny weapons against the bronze and steel of the doors. In vain they tried to carry in and place the melinite with which Zenas supplied them. Fanaer showered them with stones and blazing timbers. Three times men carrying the deadly cakes of explosive were stricken so that the melinite blew up and tore them to shreds.

All night long the attack was maintained. All the night Polaris raged helplessly before that stubborn barrier of stone. In the morning light he counseled with Oleric, Zenas, and Zoar.

"If you could but clear a way for my beasts!" groaned Zoar. "Then I would send them against the gates, though it killed them—which might well happen, for those gates are heavy enough to challenge even the strength of an amaloc."

Zenas sprang up and beat himself on the forehead.

"Doddering fool that I am!" he cried. "Here we have wasted men and time, and because my wits were sleeping in my boot-heels. Get your amalocs ready, Zoar."

While Oleric sent one more assault against the gates, the geologist directed his engineers, under the cover of the attack, to mine, not the gates, but the pile of stones itself, with the melinite. Four big charges of the explosive they placed in Fanaer's barricade, and Zenas, with a tap of his finger on the battery, blew the barrier against the wall.

Hardly had the stones quit falling when an amaloc rushed the gateway. Zoar spoke truly when he said those gates were strong. Fearful as was the impetus of the beast's charge, and though it cracked the great steel plates which protected its head with the impact, it did not shatter the gates. It withdrew from the onset somewhat sick and groggy—if that word may be applied to the mental condition of the amaloc. Zoar sent in another.

Four of the monsters were launched successively against the portals before the gates crashed down. The last shock was so fearful that the beast which delivered it fell just beyond the gateway and died with a broken skull in the midst of the ruin it had made.

Through the gap and into the Mazanion avenue, almost under the lee of the falling mammoth, flashed Polaris, mounted and in full armor. Hard behind him rode Oleric. Ahead of them the wide street was choked with Maeronican soldiery, and the son of the snows would have charged without pause; for the time that was left him was reduced to minutes now. Taking of the gates had not been quick or easy, and Shamar was high in the heavens.

But the red captain caught at his bridle-rein.

"Hold, friend and king; you will peril your life needlessly," he shouted. "Leave this desperate scum to Zoar, and follow where he leads. Ah! here he comes! Now see them scatter!"

Oleric threw back his head and laughed. But Polaris, with that sun riding high above him, was in no mood for laughter.

In through the rifted gateway thrust Ixstus. The giant amaloc was in his full panoply of war. On his head he bore proudly his master, Zoar the aged, and in the turret behind Zoar rode the Goddess Glorian—Glorian coming to the end to take what gift fate had in store.

Under the swaying tusks of Ixstus terror shouted aloud in the street. Behind him, his sons and grandsons were pushing in through the gap in the wall. Bel-Ar's battered soldiers had had enough and full measure of Ixstus and his family. They did not wait now for the first screaming trumpet-call, but cast down their arms and scampered away—anywhere, so that they might put strong walls between themselves and the tribe of Ixstus.

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Then the general Fanaer rode forward and surrendered his sword to Oleric. He was a small, thin man, this famous warrior, with a twisted nose between pale-blue eyes, and curling, yellow beard.

"I have fought you my best for the king, my master," he said. "But you have taken Adlaz, and my work is done." He glanced curiously at Polaris. "Haste you, king of Ruthar," he said, not unkindly. "They are doing sacrifice in Shamar's temple."

Like an arrow from a bow, Polaris shot forward, spurring his horse. Oleric galloped after him. Behind them thundered Ixstus, shaking the pavement with his tread. Nor, strive as the fleet horses might, could they more than barely keep ahead of the amaloc. A race with death had begun.

Lest harm befall, the zind Maxtan led a squadron of his mounted hillsmen in the wake of the speeding riders. Gray Jastla rode in the front rank.

Before Polaris's galloping steed leaped and barked the great dog Rombar, who was more fleet of foot than any horse. To keep him out of harm's way in the battles, Rombar had been chained in hateful captivity for months. When the Mazanion gates were down and the amalocs cleared the street, the man who had charge of Rombar slipped his leash and let him go.

THEY rode madly through the splendid grounds of the temple, where the sacred bulls fled bellowing before the approach of Ixstus. At the foot of the long stairway, Polaris and Oleric threw themselves from their steeds, and, drawing their swords, dashed up the marble steps. But Zoar with a word of command, set Ixstus to the ascent, and the amaloc distanced the running men.

Scarce two feet of Shamar's black altar separated the head of Rose Emer from the fiery danger, and the rock where she lay was almost blistering hot, when Ixstus, with a scream of triumph, burst through the ranks of the guard at the southern door and strode into the lofty shrine. As the beast paused, blinking and stretching out an inquiring trunk in the direction of the puzzling shaft of light, two armored men ran around his ponderous bulk and leaped onto the altar.

Rhaen would have given the word then to close the dome and stop the ray; but the strain of his anxiety had been too much for the aged priest. As he opened his mouth to shout, his knees loosened, and he fell in a swoon at the base of the orichalcum pillar.

With four strokes of his sword, Polaris severed the golden chains and swept the senseless form of Rose from the altar. Oleric the Red did the like service for Brooks. Now might the finger of Shamar move on unheeded.

Polaris knelt with his love in his arms. As he bent over her, Oleric shouted in warning. The son of the snows leaped to his feet in time to catch on his sword the blade of Bel-Ar, the king.

Once again Ruthar and Ad, personified in their two rulers, were face to face.

From the four doorways came the devoted men of the palace-guard. Bel-Ar, who had fallen back a pace, lifted his hand.

"There is that between this man and me which only death may take away," he said. "Let none interfere—unless the slave is afraid to fight." He fixed his burning eyes on Polaris. At that last remark Oleric the Red laughed loudly.

Under other circumstances, Janess might have been minded to let Bel-Ar go free. Whatever were his faults, the Maeronican king was a brave man, one who did not bow down and weep when misfortune overtook him. But Polaris had just seen his dear lady chained to the horror of the sacrificial stone because of this man, and his fell religion and relentless practices against strangers. Minos, Memene, Everson, the company of the *Minnetonka*, the fallen of the hosts of Ruthar and of Ad—for all those deaths Bel-Ar was responsible. Surely his doors were haunted by many ghosts!

With no word in answer to the king's taunt, Polaris swung his sword, and the fight began. Bel-Ar pressed in with a shower of blows, seeking to bear his adversary down by the sheer weight and fury of his attack. He was a powerful man, perhaps the strongest warrior in all his broad lands, as he had boasted—but he had met a stronger now.

With the skill in fence that had been taught him by Jastla, the son of the snows guarded himself against those lightning blows, letting Bel-Ar weary himself until an opening should come—as his patience had told him it always would, no matter how hardy the fighter.

Jastla himself stood by the altar and watched his pupil fight. For Maxtan and his cavalry had reached the temple. On one side of the altar stood the men of Ruthar and Ixstus. On the other were ranged the gleaming bronze lines of Bel-Ar's guard.

Harder and harder the Maeronican pressed the fight. His blade swung like

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a circle of flame. Warily Polaris fended. Came a clash and a clang of falling steel, and a cry of dismay from the Rutharians. Under the stout bronze of Bel-Ar their champion's sword had snapped short off at the hilt.

With a yell of exultation, Bel-Ar sprang in to make an end. And those who watched the fray were bound by honor not to interfere. Oleric groaned, and Jastla tugged at his white beard and ground his teeth in dismay. Then he sent up a roaring shout:

"Well thrown! Oh, well thrown!"

Under the vengeful sweep of the singing blade Polaris had leaped and caught the Maeronican around the middle. The blow of the sword fell harmless. But Polaris swung Bel-Ar up to his shoulder, aye, and over it, and dashed him down on the marble floor.

One of the golden captains of the guard ran to the king's side and unhelmed him. Bel-Ar was dead, his back broken by the terrible fall.

"Heard ever a man the like?" roared Jastla. "The strongest warrior in Adlaz tossed like a toy and slain by an unarmed man!"

Through the fierce fray Glorian had sat like a statue, unable to stir or speak. As the Rutharians shouted in triumph, she roused and cried out:

"Look to the priest! Haste! He burns!"

Unnoticed in the stir of the combat, the ray of Shamar had moved on down the length of the altar. The priests in the dome had fled their posts in terror, and there had been none to stay the mechanism. In the path of Shamar's finger lay Rhaen, Shamar's priest, swooned and helpless. The ray struck him. Aid was too late.

Rhaen was a horrid sight when he was pulled from the altar. His soul had gone—perhaps to seek the god whom he had served.

On Ixstus's head stood Glorian in her silver armor.

"So ends the religion of Shamar!" she cried. With the battle-ax she carried, she bent over and struck the crystal vase and shattered it.

AT THE other end of the altar of basalt the great ray beat on the pillar of orichalcum, so that the surface of the metal was melted and the cruel laws of Ad were effaced. With the laws perished the prophecy.

Water was dashed on the face of Rose Emer, and presently she opened her eyes and sat up and realized that she was not dead. Before them all, Polaris took her into his arms and kissed her—for such is the privilege of kings. Glorian, watching from Ixstus's back, turned white with agony and clenched her slender fingers so that the nails bit into her palms.

"Oh, be strong, my heart," she whispered to herself. "My soul has said it—*my time will come!*"

Zenas Wright came soon, and at the altar of Shamar was held a reunion where hearts were too full for talking, until Ensign Brooks spoke up and said:

"Lead me to a dinner-table, somebody. First they worked the flesh off my bones. Then they tried to roast me along with a bull's head and a pretty woman—but never once did they give me a decent meal."

"You shall have your dinner," said Polaris. "But first there is something which I will have done, here and now, if may be." He turned to Oleric, while Rose Emer's cheeks, that had been so wan, flamed rosy red.

"Has one of these priests here the power to perform a marriage ceremony?" Janess asked.

"Surely," replied Oleric. And then the red captain smiled broadly as he caught the import of the question. "Hale one of them here, Jastla," he said.

Jastla came soon, gripping a sadly scared priest of Shamar by the slack of his gown. "Do you, Oleric, who understand more of his jargon than I do, listen that he does a good job of it," grumbled the chieftain. "For if he doesn't, I'll flay him."

But Glorian was great-hearted, even befitting her title of goddess. She now stepped down from the amaloc to the altar.

"In this let Glorian of Ruthar serve you," she said. "I have the power, and the knot that I shall tie, though it shall be more gentle than if done by this dog of Shamar, yet will it be as binding."

So, after the long years and their perils, Polaris and his Rose-maid were wedded, Oleric the Red producing the ring. And when she had pronounced the words which made them one, Glorian took Rose in her arms and kissed her on the forehead.

"May you be very happy, my sister," she whispered.

* * *

Now here the pen that has written this history ceases, to give place to that of one of its chief actors, who has a parting word to tell.

(Continued on page 129)

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What kind of yarns will sea-women spin when women take to running ships of the line? Hearken to the tale of the Ancient Mariness, as astounding as any yet spun of the trackless seas!

By Francis Stevens

FRIEND ISLAND

IT WAS upon the waterfront that I first met her, in one of the shabby little tea shops frequented by able sailoresses of the poorer type. The uptown, glittering resorts of the Lady Aviators' Union were not for such as she.

Stern of feature, bronzed by wind and sun, her age could only be guessed, but I surmised at once that in her I beheld a survivor of the age of turbines and oil engines—a true sea-woman of that elder time when woman's superiority to man had not been so long recognized. When, to emphasize their victory, women in all ranks were sterner than today's need demands.

The spruce, smiling young maidens—engine-women and stokers of the great aluminum rollers, but despite their profession, very neat in gold-braided blue knickers and boleros—these looked askance at the hard-faced relic of a harsher day, as they passed in and out of the shop. I, however, brazenly ignoring similar glances at myself, a mere male intruding on the haunts of the world's ruling sex, drew a chair up beside the veteran. I ordered a full pot of tea, two cups and a plate of macaroons, and put on my most ingratiating air. Possibly my unconcealed admiration and interest were wiles not exercised in vain. Or the macaroons and tea, both excellent, may have loosened the old sea-woman's tongue. At any rate, under cautious questioning, she had soon launched upon a series of reminiscences well beyond my hopes for color and variety.

"When I was a lass," quoth the sea-woman, after a time, "there was none of this high-flying, gilt-edged, leather-stocking luxury about the sea. We sailed by the power of our oil and gasoline. If they failed on us, like as not 'twas the rubber ring and the rolling wave for ours."

She referred to the archaic practise of placing a pneumatic affair called a life-preserver beneath the arms, in case of that dreaded disaster, now so unheard of, shipwreck.

"In them days there was still many a man bold enough to join our crews. And I've knowed cases," she added condescendingly, "where just by the muscle and brawn of such men some poor sailor lass has reached shore alive that would have fed the sharks without 'em. Oh, I ain't so down on men as you might think. It's the spoiling of them that I don't hold with. There's too much preached nowadays that man is fit for nothing but to fetch and carry and do nurse-work in big child-homes. To my mind, a man who hasn't the nerve of a woman ain't fitted to father children, let alone raise 'em. But that's not here nor there. My time's past, and I know it, or I wouldn't be setting here gossipin' to you, my lad, over an empty teapot."

I took the hint, and with our cups replenished, she bit thoughtfully into her fourteenth macaroon and continued.

"There's one voyage I'm not likely to forget, though I live to be as old as Cap'n Mary Barnacle, of the *Shouter*. 'Twas aboard the old *Shouter* that this here voyage occurred, and it was her last and likewise Cap'n Mary's. Cap'n Mary, she was then that decrepit, it seemed a mercy that she should go to her rest, and in good salt water at that.

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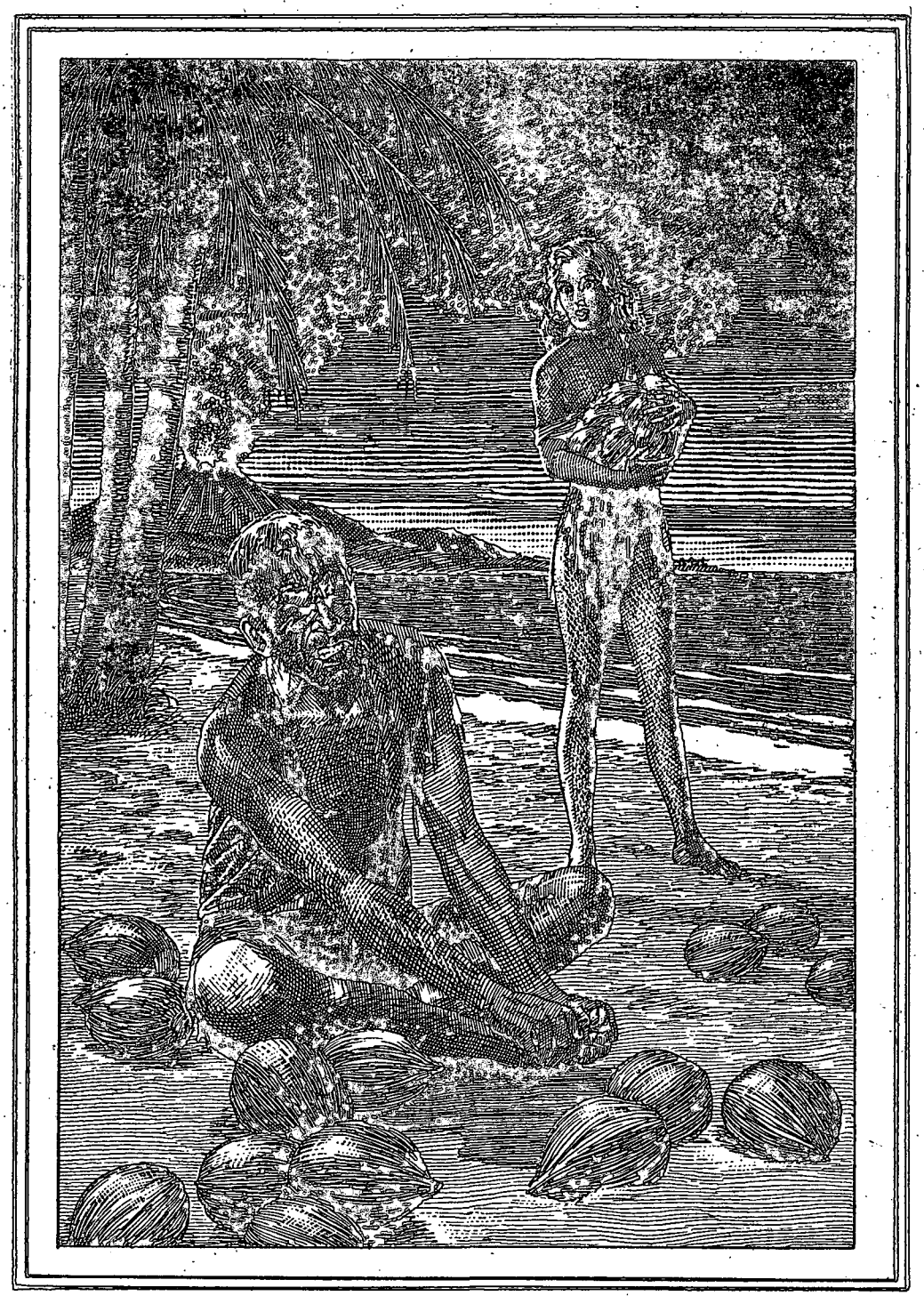

"Stop it! Stop it!" I shrieked at him, but it was too late. . . .

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"I remember the voyage for Cap'n Mary's sake, but most I remember it because 'twas then that I come the nighest in my life to committin' matrimony. For a man, the man had nerve; he was nearer bein' companionable than any other man I ever seed; and if it hadn't been for just one little event that showed up the—the *mannishness* of him, in a way I couldn't abide, I reckon he'd be keepin' house for me this minute.

"WE CLEARED from Frisco with a cargo of silkateen petticoats for Brisbane. Cap'n Mary was always strong on petticoats. Leather breeches or even half-skirts would ha' paid far better, they being more in demand like, but Cap'n Mary was three-quarters owner, and says she, land women should buy petticoats, and if they didn't it wouldn't be the Lord's fault nor hers for not providing 'em.

"We cleared on a fine day, which is an all sign—or was, then when the weather and the seas o' God still counted in the trafficking of the humankind. Not two days out we met a whirling, mucking bouncer of a gale that well nigh threw the old *Shouter* a full point off her course in the first wallop. She was a stout craft, though. None of your feather-weight, gas-lightened, paper-thin alloy shells, but toughened aluminum from stern to stern. Her turbine drove her through the combers at a forty-five knot clip, which named her a speedy craft for a freighter in them days.

"But this night, as we tore along through the creaming green billows, something unknown went 'way wrong down below.

"I was forward under the shelter of her long over-sloop, looking for a hairpin I'd dropped somewheres about that afternoon. It was a gold hairpin, and gold still being mighty scarce when I was a girl, a course I valued it. But suddenly I felt the old *Shouter* give a jump under my feet like a plane struck by a shell in full flight. Then she trembled all over for a full second, frightened like. Then, with the crash of doomsday ringing in my ears, I felt myself sailing through the air right into the teeth o' the shrieking gale, as near as I could judge. Down I come in the hollow of a monstrous big wave, and as my ears doused under I thought I heard a splash close by. Coming up, sure enough, there close by me was floating a new, patent, hermetic, thermo-ice-chest. Being as it was empty, and being as it was shut up air-tight, that ice-chest made as sweet a life-preserver as a woman could wish in such an hour. About ten foot by twelve, it floated high in the raging sea. Out on its top I scrambled, and hanging on by a handle I looked expectant for some of my poor fellow-women to come floating by. Which they never did, for the good reason that the *Shouter* had blowed up and went below, petticoats, Cap'n Mary and all."

"What caused the explosion?" I inquired.

"The Lord and Cap'n Mary Barnacle can explain," she answered piously. "Besides the oil for her turbines, she carried a power of gasoline for her alternative engines, and likely 'twas the cause of her ending so sudden like. Anyways, all I ever seen of her again was the empty ice-chest that Providence had well-nigh hove upon my head. On that I sat and floated, and floated and sat some more, till by-and-by the storm sort of blowed itself out, the sun come shining—this was next morning—and I could dry my hair and look about me. I was a young lass, then, and not bad to look upon. I didn't want to die, any more than you that's sitting there this minute. So I up and prays for land. Sure enough toward evening a speck heaves up low down on the horizon. At first I took it for a gas liner, but later found it was just a little island, all alone by itself in the great Pacific Ocean.

"Come, now, here's luck, thinks I, and with that I deserts the ice-chest, which being empty, and me having no ice to put in it, not likely to have in them latitudes, is of no further use to me. Striking out I swum a mile or so and set foot on dry land for the first time in nigh three days.

"Pretty land it were, too, though bare of human life as an iceberg in the Arctic.

"I had landed on a shining white beach that run up to a grove of lovely, waving palm trees. Above them I could see the slopes of a hill so high and green it reminded me of my own old home, up near Couquomgomoc Lake in Maine. The whole place just seemed to smile and smile at me. The palms waved and bowed in the sweet breeze, like they wanted to say, 'Just set right down and make yourself to home. We've been waiting a long time for you to come.' I cried, I was that happy to be made welcome. I was a young lass then, and sensitive-like to how folks treated me. You're laughing now, but wait and see if or not there was sense to the way I felt.

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"So I up and dries my clothes and my long, soft hair again, which was well worth drying, for I had far more of it than now. After that I walked along a piece, until there was a sweet little path meandering away into the wild woods.

"Here, thinks I, this looks like inhabitants. Be they civil or wild, I wonder? But after traveling the path a piece, lo and behold it ended sudden like in a wide circle of green grass, with a little spring of clear water. And the first thing I noticed was a slab of white board nailed to a palm tree close to the spring. Right off I took a long drink, for you better believe I was thirsty, and then I went to look at this board. It had evidently been tore off the side of a wooden packing box, and the letters was roughly printed in lead pencil.

" 'Heaven help whoever you be,' I read. 'This island ain't just right. I'm going to swim for it. You better too. Good-by. Nelson Smith.' That's what it said, but the spellin' was simply awful. It all looked quite new and recent, as if Nelson Smith hadn't more than a few hours before wrote and nailed it there.

"Well, after reading that queer warning I begun to shake all over like in a chill. Yes, I shook like I had the ague, though the hot tropic sun was burning down right on me and that alarming board. What had scared Nelson Smith so much that he had swum to get away? I looked all around real cautious and careful, but not a single frightening thing could I behold. And the palms and the green grass and the flowers still smiled that peaceful and friendly like. 'Just make yourself to home,' was wrote all over the place in plainer letters than those sprawly lead pencil ones on the board.

"Pretty soon, what with the quiet and all, the chill left me. Then I thought, 'Well, to be sure, this Smith person was just an ordinary man, I reckon, and likely he got nervous of being so alone. Likely he just fancied things which was really not. It's a pity he drowned himself before I come, though likely I'd have found him poor company. By his record I judge him a man of but common education.'

"So I decided to make the most of my welcome, and that I did for weeks to come. Right near the spring was a cave, dry as a biscuit box, with a nice floor of white sand. Nelson had lived there too, for there was a litter of stuff—tin cans—empty—scraps of newspapers and the like. I got to calling him Nelson in my mind, and then Nelly, and wondering if he was dark or fair, and how he come to be cast away there all alone, and what was the strange events that drove him to his end. I cleaned out the cave, though. He had devoured all his tin-canned provisions, however he come by them, but this I didn't mind. That there island was a generous body. Green milk-coconuts, sweet berries, turtle eggs and the like was my daily fare.

"For about three weeks the sun shone every day, the birds sang and the monkeys chattered. We was all one big, happy family, and the more I explored that island the better I liked the company I was keeping. The land was about ten miles from beach to beach, and never a foot of it that wasn't sweet and clean as a private park.

"From the top of the hill I could see the ocean, miles and miles of blue water, with never a sign of a gas liner, or even a little government running-boat. Them running-boats used to go most everywhere to keep the seaways clean of derelicts and the like. But I knowed that if this island was no more than a hundred miles off the regular courses of navigation, it might be many a long day before I'd be rescued. The top of the hill, as I found when first I climbed up there, was a wore-out crater. So I knowed that the island was one of them volcanic ones you run across so many of in the seas between Capricorn and Cancer.

"Here and there on the slopes and down through the jungly tree-growth, I would come on great lumps of rock, and these must have came up out of that crater long ago. If there was lava it was so old it had been covered up entire with green growing stuff. You couldn't have found it without a spade, which I didn't have nor want.

"WELL, at first I was happy as the hours was long. I wandered and clambered and waded and swum, and combed my long hair on the beach, having fortunately not lost my side-combs nor the rest of my gold hairpins. But by-and-by it begun to get just a bit lonesome. Funny thing, that's a feeling that, once it starts, it gets worse and worser so quick it's perfectly surprising. And right then was when the days begun to get gloomy. We had a long, sickly hot spell, like I never seen before on an ocean island. There was dull clouds across the sun from morn to night. Even the little monkeys and parrakeets, that had seemed so gay,

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moped and drowsed like they was sick. All one day I cried, and let the rain soak me through and through—that was the first rain we had—and I didn't get thorough dried even during the night, though I slept in my cave. Next morning I got up mad as thunder at myself and all the world.

"When I looked out the black clouds was billowing across the sky. I could hear nothing but great breakers roaring in on the beaches, and the wild wind raving through the lashing palms.

"As I stood there a nasty little wet monkey dropped from a branch almost on my head. I grabbed a pebble and slung it at him real vicious. 'Get away, you dirty little brute!' I shrieks, and with that there come a awful blinding flare of light. There was a long, crackling noise like a bunch of Chinese fireworks, and then a sound as if a whole fleet of *Shouters* had all went up together.

"When I come to, I found myself 'way in the back of my cave, trying to dig further into the rock with my finger nails. Upon taking thought, it come to me that what had occurred was just a lightning-clap, and going to look, sure enough there lay a big palm tree right across the glade. It was all busted and split open by the lightning, and the little monkey was under it, for I could see his tail and his hind legs sticking out.

"Now, when I set eyes on that poor, crushed little beast I'd been so mean to, I was terrible ashamed. I sat down on the smashed tree and considered and considered. How thankful I had ought to have been. Here I had a lovely, plenteous island, with food and water to my taste, when it might have been a barren, starvation rock that was my lot. And so, thinking, a sort of gradual peaceful feeling stole over me. I got cheerfuller and cheerfuller, till I could have sang and danced for joy.

"Pretty soon I realized that the sun was shining bright for the first time that week. The wind had stopped hollering, and the waves had died to just a singing murmur on the beach. It seemed kind o' strange, this sudden peace, like the cheer in my own heart after its rage and storm. I rose up, feeling sort of queer, and went to look if the little monkey had came alive again, though that was a fool thing, seeing he was laying all crushed up and very dead. I buried him under a tree root, and as I did it a conviction come to me.

"I didn't hardly question that conviction at all. Somehow, living there alone so long, perhaps my natural womanly intuition was stronger than ever before or since, and so I *knowed*. Then I went and pulled poor Nelson Smith's board off from the tree and tossed it away for the tide to carry off. That there board was an insult to my island!"

The sea-woman paused, and her eyes had a far-away look. It seemed as if I and perhaps even the macaroons and tea were quite forgotten.

"Why did you think that?" I asked, to bring her back. "How could an island be insulted?"

She started, passed her hand across her eyes, and hastily poured another cup of tea.

"Because," she said at last, poising a macaroon in mid-air, "because that island—that particular island that I had landed on—had a heart!

"When I was gay, it was bright and cheerful. It was glad when I come, and it treated me right until I got that grouchy it had to mope from sympathy. It loved me like a friend. When I flung a rock at that poor little drenched monkey critter, it backed up my act with an anger like the wrath o' God, and killed its own child to please me! But it got right cheery the minute I seen the wrongness of my ways. Nelson Smith had no business to say, 'This island ain't just right,' for it was a righter place than ever I seen elsewhere. When I cast away that lying board, all the birds begun to sing like mad. The green milk-coconuts fell right and left. Only the monkeys seemed kind o' sad like still, and no wonder. You see, their own mother, the island, had rounded on one o' them for my sake!

"After that I was right careful and considerate. I named the island Anita, not knowing her right name, or if she had any. Anita was a pretty name, and it sounded kind of South Sea like. Anita and me got along real well together from that day on. It was some strain to be always gay and singing around like a dear duck of a canary bird, but I done my best. Still, for all the love and gratitude I bore Anita, the company of an island, however sympathetic, ain't quite enough for a human being. I still got lonesome, and there was even days when I couldn't keep the clouds clear out of the sky, though I will say we had no more tornadoes.

"I think the island understood and tried to help me with all the bounty and good cheer the poor thing possessed. None the

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less my heart give a wonderful big leap when one day I seen a blot on the horizon. It drawed nearer and nearer, until at last I could make out its nature."

"A ship, of course," said I, "and were you rescued?"

"'Tweren't a ship, neither," denied the sea-woman somewhat impatiently. "Can't you let me spin this yarn without no more remarks and fool questions? This thing what was bearing down so fast with the incoming tide was neither more nor less than another island!

"You may well look startled. I was startled myself. Much more so than you, likely. I didn't know then what you, with your book-learning, very likely know now—that islands sometimes float. Their underparts being a tangled-up mess of roots and old vines that new stuff's growed over, they sometimes break away from the mainland in a brisk gale and go off for a voyage, calm as a old-fashioned, eight-funnel steamer. This one was uncomon large, being as much as two miles, maybe, from shore to shore. It had its palm trees and its live things, just like my own Anita, and I've sometimes wondered if this drifting piece hadn't really been a part of my island once—just its daughter like, as you might say.

"Be that, however, as it might be, no sooner did the floating piece get within hailing distance than I hears a human holler and there was a man dancing up and down on the shore like he was plumb crazy. Next minute he had plunged into the narrow strip of water between us and in a few minutes had swum to where I stood.

"Yes, of course it was none other than Nelson Smith!

"I knowed that the minute I set eyes on him. He had the very look of not having no better sense than the man what wrote that board and then nearly committed suicide trying to get away from the best island in all the oceans. Glad enough he was to get back, though, for the coconuts was running very short on the floater what had rescued him, and the turtle eggs wasn't worth mentioning. Being short of grub is the surest way I know to cure a man's fear of the unknown.

"WELL, to make a long story short, Nelson Smith told me he was a aeronauter. In them days to be an aeronauter was not the same as to be an aviatress is now. There was dangers in the air, and dangers in the sea, and he had met with both. His gas tank had leaked and he had dropped into the water close by Anita. A case or two of provisions was all he could save from the total wreck.

"Now, as you might guess, I was crazy enough to find out what had scared this Nelson Smith into trying to swim the Pacific. He told me a story that seemed to fit pretty well with mine, only when it come to the scary part he shut up like a clam, that aggravating way some men have. I give it up at last for just man-foolishness, and we begun to scheme to get away.

"Anita moped some while we talked it over. I realized how she must be feeling, so I explained to her that it was right needful for us to get with our kind again. If we stayed with her we should probably quarrel like cats, and maybe even kill each other out of pure human cussedness. She cheered up considerable after that, and even, I thought, got a little anxious to have us leave. At any rate, when we begun to provision up the little floater, which we had anchored to the big island by a cable of twisted bark, the green nuts fell all over the ground, and Nelson found more turtle nests in a day than I had in weeks.

"During them days I really got fond of Nelson Smith. He was a companionable body, and brave, or he wouldn't have been a professional aeronauter, a job that was rightly thought tough enough for a woman, let alone a man. Though he was not so well educated as me, at least he was quiet and modest about what he did know, not like some men, boasting most where there is least to brag of.

"Indeed, I misdoubt if Nelson and me would not have quit the sea and the air together and set up housekeeping in some quiet little town up in New England, maybe, after we had got away, if it had not been for what happened when we went. I never, let me say, was so deceived in any man before nor since. The thing taught me a lesson and I never was fooled again.

"We was all ready to go, and then one morning, like a parting gift from Anita, come a soft and favoring wind. Nelson and I run down the beach together, for we didn't want our floater to blow off and leave us. As we was running, our arms full of coconuts, Nelson Smith stubbed his bare toe on a sharp rock, and down he went. I hadn't noticed, and was going on.

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"But sudden the ground begun to shake under my feet, and the air was full of a queer, grinding, groaning sound, like the very earth was in pain.

"I turned around sharp. There sat Nelson, holding his bleeding toe in both fists and giving vent to such awful words as no decent sea-going lady would ever speak nor hear to!

"'Stop it, stop it!' I shrieked at him, but 'twas too late.

"Island or no island, Anita was a lady, too! She had a gentle heart, but she knowed how to behave when she was insulted.

"With one terrible, great roar a spout of smoke and flame belched up out o' the heart of Anita's crater hill a full mile into the air!

"I guess Nelson stopped swearing. He couldn't have heard himself, anyways. Anita was talking now with tongues of flame and such roars as would have bespoke the raging protest of a continent.

"I grabbed that fool man by the hand and run him down to the water. We had to swim good and hard to catch up with our only hope, the floater. No bark rope could hold her against the stiff breeze that was now blowing, and she had broke her cable. By the time we scrambled aboard great rocks was falling right and left. We couldn't see each other for a while for the clouds of fine gray ash.

"It seemed like Anita was that mad she was flinging stones after us, and truly I believe that such was her intention. I didn't blame her, neither!

"Lucky for us the wind was strong and we was soon out of range.

"'So!' says I to Nelson, after I'd got most of the ashes out of my mouth, and shook my hair clear of cinders. 'So, that was the reason you up and left sudden when you was there before! You aggravated that island till the poor thing druv you out!'

"'Well,' says he, and not so meek as I'd have admired to see him, 'how could I know the darn island was a lady?'

"'Actions speak louder than words,' says I. 'You should have knowed it by her ladylike behavior!'

"'Is volcanoes and slingin' hot rocks ladylike?' he says. 'Is snakes ladylike? T'other time I cut my thumb on a tin can, I cussed a little bit. Say—just a li'l' bit! An' what comes at me out o' all the caves, and out o' every crack in the rocks, and out o' the very spring o' water where I'd been drinkin'? Why snakes! *Snakes,* if you please, big, little, green, red and sky-blue-scarlet! What 'd I do? Jumped in the water, of course. Why wouldn't I? I'd ruther swim and drown than be stung or swallowed to death. But how was I t' know the snakes come outta the rocks because I cussed?'

"'You couldn't,' I agrees, sarcastic. 'Some folks never knows a lady till she up and whangs 'em over the head with a brick. A real, gentle, kind-like warning, them snakes were, which you would not heed! Take shame to yourself, Nelly,' says I, right stern, 'that a decent little island like Anita can't associate with you peaceable, but you must hurt her sacredest feelings with language no lady would stand by to hear!'

"I never did see Anita again. She may have blew herself right out of the ocean in her just wrath at the vulgar, disgustin' language of Nelson Smith. I don't know. We was took off the floater at last, and I lost track of Nelson just as quick as I could when we was landed at Frisco.

"He had taught me a lesson. A man is just full of mannishness, and the best of 'em ain't good enough for a lady to sacrifice her sensibilities to put up with.

"Nelson Smith, he seemed to feel real bad when he learned I was not for him, and then he apologized. But apologies weren't no use to me. I could never abide him, after the way he went and talked right in the presence of me and my poor, sweet lady friend, Anita!"

NOW I am well versed in the lore of the sea in all ages. Through mists of time I have enviously eyed wild voyagings of sea rovers who roved and spun their yarns before the stronger sex came into its own, and ousted man from his heroic pedestal. I have followed—across the printed page—the wanderings of Odysseus. Before Gulliver I have burned the incense of tranced attention; and with reverent awe considered the history of one Munchausen, a baron. But alas, these were only men!

In what field is not woman our subtle superior?

Meekly I bowed my head, and when my eyes dared lift again, the ancient mariness had departed, leaving me to sorrow for my surpassed and outdone idols. Also with a bill for macaroons and tea of such incredible proportions that in comparison therewith I found it easy to believe her story!

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(Continued from page 8)

superseded by a series of short illustrated biographies of your various artists. Tell ng us how long Paul, etc., have been in the field, how they started and why; age, hobbies, other accomplishments.

Use more of Poulton's drawings. Saunders did a good symbolic mixture of Dr. Montague's face, an atom and a biogenetic something, but the odd plant life is not like E. North described, which is unfortunate. Cover is otherwise good. All in all, it is a better issue than most.

Let's hear from Frank Leask!

ROBERT BA[illegible]

1107 Lyon St.,
Carthage, Mo.

LIKES MORE RECENT CLASSICS

If you keep printing stories like "Three Against the Stars," you'll be getting nothing but compliments from me! Eric North is a skillful writer: he includes mystery, romance, humor, fantasy and science-fiction in one story. Few writers can do that. I'm glad you're printing newer stories now. Some of the old ones are good, but science-fantasy really got started about 1939.

I'm sure all your readers will enjoy the new NBC radio show at 8 o'clock (EST) every Sat. nite. It's called "Dimension X" and is very good.

I'm looking forward to the Kuttner-Moore novel next ish. Both are good writers.

J. T. OLIVER.

712 32nd St.,
Columbus, Georgia.

WANTS THE OLD YARNS

I have been able to obtain copies of only four issues of the revived *Fantastic Novels*, but I have been greatly pleased with all of these.

The latest issue I have is September, 1949. I was pleased to see "Dwellers in the Mirage" reprinted, as I consider it Merritt's best novel, after "The Metal Monster." Finlay's illustrations are better than the ones he did for the 1941 reprint of this tale, although still not his best work. I wish he would curb his fondness for soap-bubble effects, and regret that he has so much to do nowadays that he cannot return to the style of his early work done in the 1936 to 1938 period, when much of his best work was published. I still have fond memories of his illustrations for R. Bloch's "The Faceless God," S. Quinn's "Witch House," and his pictorial interpretations of "Kubla Khan," the vampire from "A Wine of Wizardy," and "Old Cornish Litany." He has done scores of fine illustrations since, but I don't think he has ever quite reached the standard he set with those early masterpieces.

I found Lawrence's cover for this issue unsatisfactory. Lur's hair in the story is described as "flaming red." Khalk'ru should be black, floating in a field of yellow. Finlay's cover design for the same story was greatly superior.

I hope that you will be able to reprint shortly "Treasures of Tantalus," by Garret Smith. I have been able to obtain only two parts of the original printing of this, but what I read was more enjoyable than any of the so-called classics of recent years. However, I always find the old Munsey tales better entertainment than the modern streamlined productions.

THOMAS G. L. COCKCROFT.

3 Stilling St.,
Melling,
Lower Hutt,
New Zealand.

A NEW FANZINE

I am only 23 years old but have been a science-fiction fan since the sixth grade at school. I began reading "Buck Rogers" and E. R. Burroughs' tales then, and then started reading the pulp magazines of science-fiction. Needless to say, I am very devoted to the field of stf and fantasy and don't know what I'd do without such literature to give me the welcome change from time to time.

I have been just perusing through some of your back mags and I have only admiration and fine praise for your praiseworthy magazines. I think both F.N. and F.F.M. are two of the finest of this type of literature on the market. Keep it up!

I find Finlay's covers well above average and to my taste; they are truly good art. They show a decided advantage over the type of art other mags use. I would say "Keep Finlay and Lawrence for good art work!"

I have quite a number of back issues—featuring some of the best in both science fiction and fantasy to trade.

I am very desirous of getting rid of these mags—by selling them, if possible—to make more space for newer issues. I can assure anyone who writes me, of a prompt delivery on any order and of a satisfactory buy.

My prices are right because I want to get rid of these and am selling at reduced prices. I sell on a money-back guarantee of satisfaction.

I suppose since I am writing to you, I may as well plug my mimeographed 'zine, *Science and Culture*, which is an all-fact, no fiction affair. It is devoted to news, discussions, debates, articles on all phases of science, philosophy, and related subjects. It is published for "The United Scientific and Cultural Organization," by "Omnifact Press," which is the name of our staff.

It gives reviews of various fanzines, articles on stf fandom, etc., but never any fiction.

A Devoted Reader of Good Science-fiction,

STANLEY F. CROUCH.

The United Scientific and Cultural Organization
Stanley E. Crouch, Pres.
Ed. "Science and Culture"
Sterling, Va.

(Continued on page 123)

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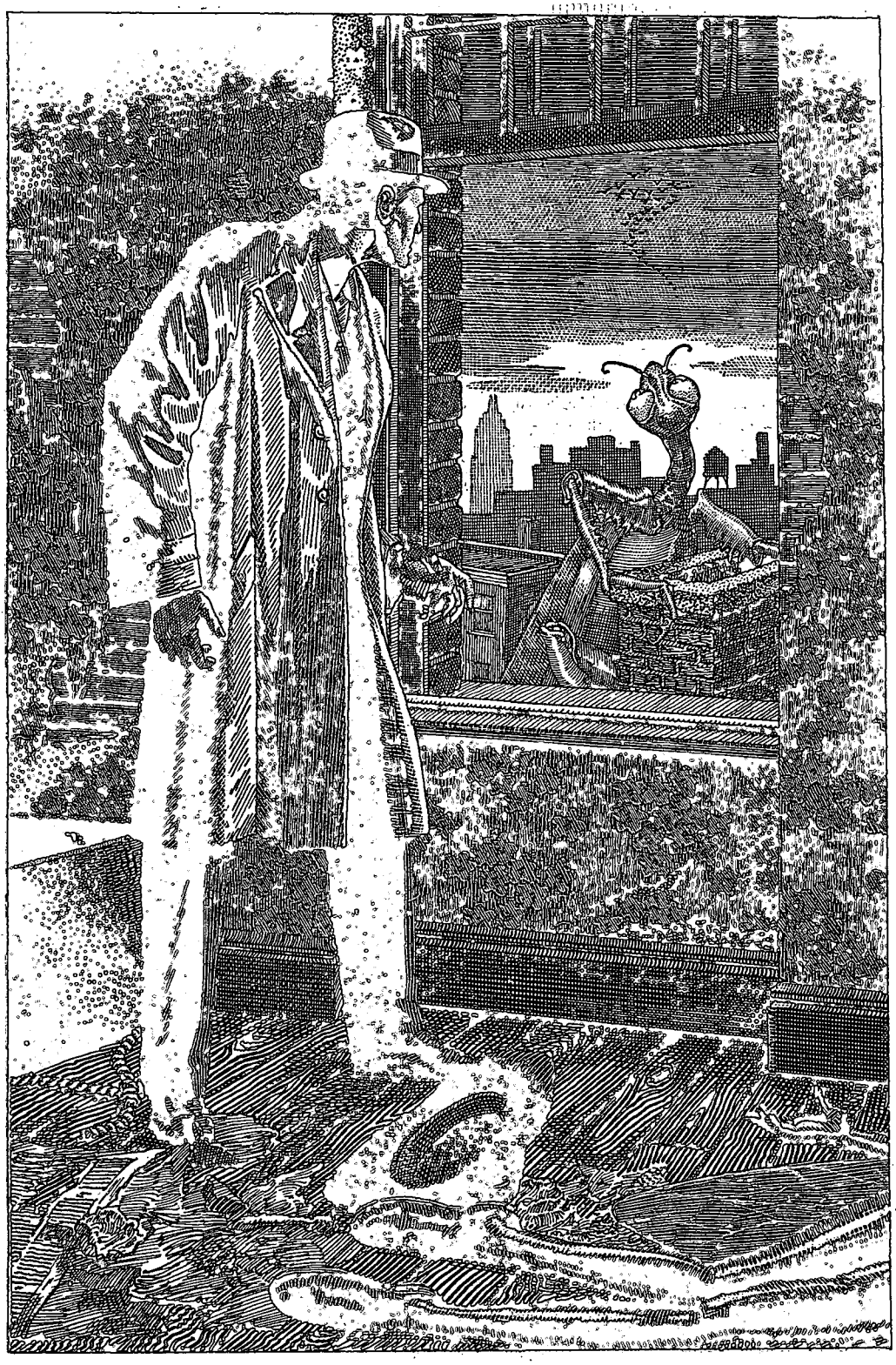

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MIMIC

By Donald A. Wollheim

He walked alone in the dawn and the dusk, and no one knew his name. But the day he perished, and the way he perished —a world will never forget!

IT IS less than five hundred years since an entire half of the world was discovered. It is less than two hundred years since the discovery of the last continent. The sciences of chemistry and physics go back scarce one century. The science of aviation goes back forty years. The science of atomics is being born.

And yet we think we know a lot.

We know little or nothing. Some of the most startling things are unknown to us. When they are discovered they may shock us to the bone.

We search for secrets in the far islands of the Pacific and among the ice fields of the frozen North while under our very noses, rubbing shoulders with us every day, there may walk the undiscovered. I'd

I saw two big eyes staring into the sky. . . .

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is a curious fact of nature that that which is in plain view is oft best hidden.

I have always known of the man in the black cloak. Since I was a child he has always lived on my street, and his eccentricities are so familiar that they go unmentioned except among casual visitors. Here, in the heart of the largest city in the world, in swarming New York, the eccentric and the odd may flourish unhindered.

As children we had hilarious fun jeering at the man in black when he displayed his fear of women. We watched, in our evil, childish way, for those moments; we tried to get him to show anger. But he ignored us completely, and soon we paid him no further heed, even as our parents did.

We saw him only twice a day. Once in the early morning, when we would see his six-foot figure come out of the grimy dark hallway of the tenement at the end of the street and stride down towards the elevated to work—again when he came back at night. He was always dressed in a long black cloak that came to his ankles, and he wore a wide-brimmed black hat down far over his face. He was a sight from some weird story out of the old lands. But he harmed nobody, and paid attention to nobody.

Nobody—except perhaps women.

When a woman crossed his path, he would stop in his stride and come to a dead halt. We could see that he closed his eyes until she had passed. Then he would snap those wide watery blue eyes open and march on as if nothing had happened.

He was never known to speak to a woman. He would buy some groceries maybe once a week, at Antonio's—but only when there were no other patrons there. Antonio said once that he never talked, he just pointed at things he wanted and paid for them in bills that he pulled out of a pocket somewhere under his cloak. Antonio did not like him, but he never had any trouble with him either.

Now that I think of it, nobody ever did have any trouble with him.

We got used to him. We grew up on the street; we saw him occasionally when he came home and went back into the dark hallway of the house he lived in.

One of the kids on the block lived in that house too. A lot of families did. Antonio said they knew nothing much about him either, though there were one or two funny stories.

He never had visitors, he never spoke to anyone. And he had once built something in his room out of metal.

He had then, years ago, hauled up some long flat metal sheets, sheets of tin or iron, and they had heard a lot of hammering and banging in his room for several days. But that had stopped and that was all there was to that story.

Where he worked I don't know and never found out. He had money, for he was reputed to pay his rent regularly when the janitor asked for it.

Well, people like that inhabit big cities and nobody knows the story of their lives until they're all over. Or until something strange happens.

* * *

I grew up, I went to college, I studied. Finally I got a job assisting a museum curator. I spent my days mounting beetles and classifying exhibits of stuffed animals and preserved plants, and hundreds and hundreds of insects from all over.

Nature is a strange thing, I learned. You learn that very clearly when you work in a museum. You realize how nature uses the art of camouflage. There are twig insects that look exactly like a leaf or a branch of a tree. Exactly. Even to having phony vein markings that look just like the real leaf's. You can't tell them apart, unless you look very carefully.

Nature is strange and perfect that way. There is a moth in Central America that looks like a wasp. It even has a fake stinger made of hair, which it twists and curls just like a wasp's stinger. It has the same colorings and, even though its body is soft and not armored like a wasp's, it is colored to appear shiny and armored. It even flies in the daytime when wasps do, and not at night like all the other moths. It moves like a wasp. It knows somehow that it is helpless and that it can survive only by pretending to be as deadly to other insects as wasps are.

I learned about army ants, and their strange imitators.

Army ants travel in huge colums of thousands and hundreds of thousands. They move along in a flowing stream several yards across and they eat everything in their path. Everything in the jungle is afraid of them. Wasps, bees, snakes, other ants, birds, lizards, beetles—even men run away, or get eaten.

But in the midst of the army ants there also travel many other creatures—creatures that aren't ants at all, and that the

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army ants would kill if they knew of them. But they don't know of them because these other creatures are disguised. Some of them are beetles that look like ants. They have false markings like ant-thoraxes and they run along in imitation of ant speed. There is even one that is so long it is marked like three ants in single file. It moves so fast that the real ants never give it a second glance.

There are weak caterpillars that look like big armored beetles. There are all sorts of things that look like dangerous animals. Animals that are the killers and superior fighters of their groups have no enemies. The army ants and the wasps, the sharks, the hawk and the felines. So there are a host of weak things that try to hide among them—to mimic them.

And man is the greatest killer, the greatest hunter of them all. The whole world of nature knows man for the irresistible master. The roar of his gun, the cunning of his trap, the strength and agility of his arm place all else beneath him.

IT WAS, as often happens to be the case, sheer luck that I happened to be on the street at that dawning hour when the janitor came running out of the tenement on my street shouting for help. I had been working all night mounting new exhibits.

The policeman on the beat and I were the only people besides the janitor to see the things that we found in the two dingy rooms occupied by the stranger of the black cloak.

The janitor explained—as the officer and I dashed up the narrow rickety stairs—that he had been awakened by the sound of heavy thuds and shrill screams in the stranger's rooms. He had gone out in the hallway to listen.

Severe groaning as of someone in terrible pain—the noise of someone thrashing around in agony—was coming from behind the closed door of the stranger's apartment. The janitor had listened, then run for help.

When we got there the place was silent. A faint light shone from under the doorway. The policeman knocked; there was no answer. He put his ear to the door and so did I.

We heard a faint rustling—a continuous slow rustling as of a breeze blowing paper. The cop knocked again but there was still no response.

Then, together, we threw our weight at the door. Two hard blows and the rotten old lock gave way. We burst in.

The room was filthy, the floor covered with scraps of torn paper, bits of detritus and garbage. The room was unfurnished, which I thought was odd.

In one corner there stood a metal box, about four feet square. A tight box, held together with screws and ropes. It had a lid, opening at the top, which was down and fastened with a sort of wax seal.

The stranger of the black cloak lay in the middle of the floor—dead.

He was still wearing the cloak. The big slouch hat was lying on the floor some distance away. From the inside of the box the faint rustling was coming.

We turned over the stranger, took the cloak off. For several instants we saw nothing amiss—

At first we saw a man, dressed in a somber, featureless black suit. He had a coat and skin-tight pants.

His hair was short and curly brown. It stood straight up in its inch-long length. His eyes were open and staring. I noticed first that he had no eyebrows, only a curious dark line in the flesh over each eye.

It was then that I realized that he had no nose. But no one had ever noticed that before. His skin was oddly mottled. Where

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the nose should have been there were dark shadowings that made the appearance of a nose, if you only just glanced at him. Like the work of a skillful artist in a painting.

His mouth was as it should be, and slightly open—but he had no teeth. His head perched upon a thin neck.

The suit was—not a suit. It was part of him. It was his body.

What we thought was a coat was a huge black wing sheath, like a beetle has. He had a thorax like an insect, only the wing sheath covered it and you couldn't notice it when he wore the cloak. The body bulged out below, tapering off into the two long, thin hind legs. His arms came out from under the top of the "coat." He had a tiny secondary pair of arms folded tightly across his chest. There was a sharp round hole newly pierced in his chest just above these arms still oozing a watery liquid.

The janitor fled gibbering. The officer was pale but standing by his duty. I heard him muttering under his breath an endless stream of *Hail Marys*.

The lower thorax—the "abdomen"—was very long and insectlike. It was crumpled up now like the wreck of an airplane fuselage.

I recalled the appearance of a female wasp that had just laid eggs—her thorax had had that empty appearance.

The sight was a shock such as leaves one in full control. The mind rejects it, and it is only in afterthought that one can feel the dim shudder of horror.

The rustling was still coming from the box. I motioned the white-faced cop and we went over and stood before it. He took his nightstick and knocked away the waxen seal.

Then we heaved and pulled the lid open.

A wave of noxious vapor assailed us. We staggered back as suddenly a stream of flying things shot out of the huge iron container. The window was open, and straight out into the first glow of dawn they flew.

There must have been dozens of them. They were about two or three inches long and they flew on wide gauzy beetle wings. They looked like little men, strangely terrifying as they flew—clad in their black suits, with expressionless faces and their dots of watery blue eyes. And they flew out on transparent wings that came from under their black beetle coats.

I ran to the window, fascinated, almost hypnotized. The horror of it had not reached my mind at once. Afterwards I have had spasms of numbing terror as my mind tries to put the things together. The whole business was so utterly unexpected.

We knew of army ants and their imitators, yet it never occurred to us that we too were army ants of a sort. We knew of stick insects and it never occurred to us that there might be others that disguise themselves to fool, not other animals, but the supreme animal himself—man.

We found some bones in the bottom of that iron case afterwards. But we couldn't identify them.

Perhaps we did not try hard. They might have been human—

I suppose the stranger of the black cloak did not fear women so much as it distrusted them. Women notice men, perhaps, more closely then other men do. Women might become suspicious sooner of the inhumanity, the deception. And then there might perhaps have been some touch of instinctive feminine jealousy. The stranger was disguised as a man, but its sex was surely female. The things in the iron box were its young.

BUT it is the other thing I saw when I I ran to the window that has shaken me most. The policeman did not see it. Nobody else saw it but me, and I only for an instant.

Nature practises deceptions in every angle. Evolution will create a being for any niche, no matter how unlikely.

When I went to the window, I saw the small cloud of flying things rising up into the sky and sailing away into the purple distance. The dawn was breaking and the first rays of the sun were just striking over the housetops.

Shaken, I looked away from that fourth floor tenement room over the roofs of the lower buildings. Chimneys and walls and empty clotheslines made the scenery over which the tiny mass of horror passed.

And then I saw a chimney, not thirty feet away on the next roof. It was squat and red brick and had two black pipe ends flush with its top. I saw it suddenly vibrate, oddly. And its red brick surface seem to peel away, and the black pipe openings turn suddenly white.

I saw two big eyes staring up into the sky.

A great, flat-winged thing detached itself silently from the surface of the real chimney and darted hungrily after the cloud of flying things.

I watched until all had lost themselves in the sky.

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(Continued from page 117)

WANTS MERRITT ISSUE

Somehow, it has become a grea wish to read "Seven Footprints to Satan", and if a reader is good enough to send me one I hope I may be allowed to do something in return.

There may be some English magazine he might like in return—or I could guide him or her around London, o something like that, some day.

Yours in Mysticism,
S. J. MANNIX.

159 Guinness Trust Bldgs.,
Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith,
London, W.6.
England.

FAN TRIES FICTION!

Well, I had a rather difficult time locating a copy of F.N., it being probably sold out. After cruising over more than twenty newsstands, at last my perceptive orbs lodged their vision upon one remaining copy, and with quickening pulse, I brought the treasured quarter across! When, wot should happen!?! A heavy hand dragged at my well-padded shoulder and spun me around as another paw grabbed at my May copy of F.N. — I recognized the owner of the grappling hooks as one of Little Louie's henchmen. I raised an arm in mild protestation and ejaculated, "Why don't Louie mind his own business?" The torpedo growled, "De boss is taking over all the SF mags' territory, not that he gives a hang about de others, but he wanna make sure dat none of the Popular Publications' SF zines are overlooked . . . so, come on meatball, hand over that copy of the May F.N., the boss's been lookin' high an' low fer a copy!"

With the alacrity and deadliness of a rattler, I drew my trusty Luger (which I kept for such emergencies) out of its holster and fired pointblank into the visage of this unwholesome personage. He dropped like a sack of potatoes, and no sooner did he hit the cement than a volley of fire began to pour from a black sedan which was parked thirty feet away from me. I fell to the sidewalk and aimed my automatic at the gas tank of the slowly moving car as it began to approach me . . . and, in a geyser of flame and in an ear-shattering explosion, the car blew up into fiery atoms, carrying Louie, his gang et al. into their deserved oblivion.

Looking once more towards the henchman's still form, I gasped in terror as I realized that I had to get that copy of F.N. immediately, and I quickly dove and grasped the copy from one of the thug's caressing hands; and I realized that if I'd have been one moment late in seizing it away, the blood would have reached the mag ere I could get to it, thus, undoubtedly making it entirely illegible for me to read that night.

Late that evening, I arrived at my domicile, spoke the magic word, "Open Sesame", walked into my sanctum sanctorum as the panel closed slowly behind me, and under the flickering glare of the kerosene lamp, sitting upon a coffin, I turned to the first few pages of the May F.N. to begin another enjoyable repast of fine STFantasy literature.

As usual and as it has been your want, the lead novel by Eric North was of outstanding merit. I believe that we should have, from herewith, more items like "Three Against the Stars," and it's odd how one can find *for only one quarter*, novels and STFantasy reading matter in your zines which would put some of the $3 and $5 hard-cover books to a shame of mediocrity . . . no, I don't suggest for you to raise the price . . . simply keep up what you're doing; if possible, enlarge your periodicals with an additional 24 to 36 pages, though you're O.K. as you stand.

"A Priest of Quiche," by Francis James, though not the best story in the May ish, was one of the better shorts you've printed in a long time. However, Wallis' "From Time's Dawn," came very close to stealing and/or tying for first place with the lead novel. Frankly, if anyone did the illos besides Paul, this tale would never have appeared as good as it did to me. Paul has the fine quality which marks all of his artwork as original and I rank him, along with Finlay, as a leader in STF-artistry today. . . . By all means, let's have *pul-lenty* more from Paul along with Finlay, of course. "Mr. Primrose Goes to the Devil," by William Templeton, was a clever little tidbit of fantasy done in the typical Stephen V. Benét tradition of allegorical satire. I've always deeply enjoyed "pacts-with-the-devil" yarns and, even if it means pleasing this reader, I'd crave a novel and more shorts anent the above theme.

In short, another great issue of F.N. has been rapidly devoured. Regarding your illos, as usual they were in keeping with your age-old tradition of the finest STFantasy pics that could be found anywhere. Lawrence's work was good as always, but it appears that his style has fallen down a bit lately, and I surely long for similar work by him tha he once did on "The Boats of the Glen Carrig", published in an F.F.M. several years ago . . . remember his terrific style on that issue?

Once more I would like to put a plea forth to all readers of F.N. that I and the associates of the American Science-Fantasy Society can use your help in replenishing our stock of STFantasy mags and books. We can use nearly any SF zines prior to '46, and especially wanted are old copies of F.N., F.F.M., *Astounding* and *Unknown*, but we prefer issues prior to '46 above all. In turn, we will either pay a reasonable fee for any such collections of books and mags or we can trade through the large supply of hundreds of magazines and books in stock. Among the many items at hand, I have books by Merritt, Haggard, Moore, C. A. Smith etc. etc., and many of the rare and old *Amazings* (in fine shape), *Wonders*, *Unknowns*, *Astoundings* and other zines going back to 1928. In short, we wish to stock up our larder of SF

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CAN YOU HELP?

I live in a small town on the River Clyde in Scotland. A few weeks ago I met an American youth on holiday over here, and he gave me a copy of your monthly magazine, *Fantastic Novels*. The story was "Seven Footprints to Satan" and I arrived home and started to read. For the life of me I could not put the book down for four hours. The story was so gripping.

You certainly have some very gripping authors over there.

Well, I finished the book and tried to purchase another, but no luck. All the news agents in town could not get me one. They said owing to the Government dollar cuts, it was next to impossible to get American books.

Would you please be so kind as to ask any of your readers over there if they have old copies of *Fantastic Novels* they can spare for an avid convert? For I shall not rest until I can get other novels by Merritt & Co.

Wishing *Fantastic Novels* every success in the future, I am,

N. R. STACEY.

Struan Bank, McArthur St.,
Dunoon, Argyll, Scotland.

LIKES SAUNDERS' COVERS

I have just finished the May number of F.N., and in my opinion it is an issue to be proud of. It is remarkable in many ways. First: the announcement that certain of the later Munsey stories will appear in F.N. This announcement arouses hopes (no doubt unduly) that among these tales will be included some of the stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Now that the Old Master has passed away, there is even more reason than before to justify reprinting of those magazine stories which have been rather neglected, such as "Red Hawk" and mayhap even "The Quest of Tarzan."

Second: the issue is graced by a magnificent novel; one that, despite the element of science present, remains pure and beautiful fantasy. The letters from Joe Murgle to his parents were inserted at just the right spots and helped to create the mood of tenseness present at the climax of the novel. Finlay's illustrations (sigh!) —*magnifique*, as usual. Virgil has the unique ability of being able to extract a phrase or sentence from a story and amplify it into a visual masterpiece in its own right. The picture of the Flame-biogen intrigued me the most; so many, varying shapes and creatures could be perceived in the design.

Third: the return of the Fantasy Book Reviews is welcome

The three short stories are all excellent. But I did think that "Mr. Primrose Goes To The Devil" ended rather abruptly. The illustration by Peter Poulton for "A Priest of Quiche" was very good—let's see more of this boy.

Saunders doesn't have the clear-cut, semi-photographic style that Lawrence has when he's at his best; but nevertheless his covers are good. The current one is the best yet.

Ah! "Earth's Last Citadel"—I'll bet everyone is looking forward to it. I read it in the original *Argosy*, and I'm looking forward to reading it again. By the way, do you have any stories by C. L. Moore lying around that you could reprint — say "Doorway to Infinity" — from F.F.M.?

Here's hoping that we'll see the names of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Otis Adelbert Kline on F.N.'s contents page soon.

ROBERT E. BRINEY.

561 W. Western Ave.,
Muskegon, Mich.

HE WANTS PEN PALS

This ish of F.N. seems to be one of the best in many a moon. I haven't read it yet so I can't say for sure. I must revise this statement; I have read one short story. Seems to me that the rest of the line-up will have to go some to beat "Mr. Primrose Goes to the Devil." Mr. Primrose was a very smart man for twelve years ago. Personally I would have chosen Lucille Ball.

Ruth Elizabeth Fletcher: "What is science fiction? No matter what else they may say everyone has to admit that it is a branch of fantasy. What does *Fantastic Novels* print? They claim that they publish fantasy in its various forms. Therefore science fiction has a place in this mag and also in F.F.M. Therefore when you are getting *stf* you are actually getting *fantasy* but in one special branch.

Would you deny that weird and supernatural stories are fantasy? I thought not. There have been a good many of this type printed in magazines professing to be pure fantasy. So if you let them be called fantasy, then you must let everything be called fantasy. Want to argue privately? A duel! Rolled up ishes of F.N. and F.F.M., at ten miles!

Once again I want to repeat my request for pen pals. By the time this appears, (wishful thinker, ain't I) I will be 17.

ROBERT P. HOSKINS.

Lyons Falls, N.Y.

"PRIMROSE" STORY NEAT

This note must be the bearer of sad tidings. At least, I'm sad. You see, "Three Against the Stars" was a flop. To be disgustingly common, it was a stinkeroo. There. And I was so happy that it was to be printed. Long—oh, for many eons, had I heard how swell this story was supposed to be. "Aye," agree I. "Verily, it must be, for it came from *Argosy*. And it must be an interplanetary too. Lookit the title." But, what does it turn out to be? A stuffy, boring, dry, awful, long-drawn-out old

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

crumby thing, written by, for an about an Englishman, in an English setting.

I personally have nothing against Englishmen. I like the guys. And their authors have turned out some very fine stories. None can be finer than Arthur C. Clarke. But, they can also turn out disgustingly boring stuff like this! I couldn't even finish this. Oh, woe is me! And such a good cover, too.

But I did like and appreciate "From Time's Dawn". Very good. I'd like more, many more like it. That Paul pic was swell too. The other two were typical yarns. You can see what I mean. The "Primrose" tale was neat, though. Cleve. guy, this Primrose. Why didn't he choose . . . oh, yes, this was before Jane Russell happened.

I know next F.N. will be top rate. Maybe I'll read it and find out so I can anticipate the July issue! (Sounds funny, huh? I have the story.)

ED COX.

4 Spring St.,
Lubec, Maine.

MAY ISSUE SATISFYING

I could hardly claim that I was dissatisfied with the May issue of F.N. Though the title of the lead novel was a bit misleading— I expected rockets and strange planets—the contents made up for my initial disappointment. I liked North's contrast between the sodden worldliness of the family scenes and the bizarre fantasy that was unfolding at the lab. And you couldn't have picked a better artist for the illustrations; certain passages of "Three Against The Stars" sounded as though they had been expressly written for the pen of Virgil Finlay.

"A Priest Of Quiche" and "From Time's Dawn" had one thing in common—like so many stories that were written back in their time, they were told by someone to whom the story had originally been related. Though I don't care for this type of frame, "From Time's Dawn" pleased me, and Paul's illos gave it just the proper touch.

"Mr. Primrose Goes To The Devil" was interesting, laughable—but just a little too pat. And somehow, Satan's part in it didn't seem well enough motivated.

But I don't think any of the stories, or even all of them together, can compete with the one coming up in the next issue. I look forward with great anticipation to "Earth's Last Citadel", by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner. I would expect a lot from either of those authors alone—but with them together, man and wife, it should be nothing less than suprawonderful!

Will all fans with a wirecorder, interested in WIREZ-spondence please contact me? Write to

SHELBY VICK.

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Florida.

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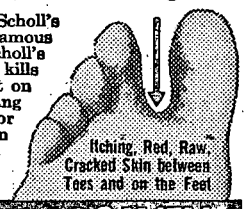

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

F.N. AND F.F.M. TOPS

I haven't heard of "Three Against the Stars" before, but I'm relieved to know that it is an *Argosy* reprint. I do 't object to some modern stories now and then—especially if I haven't read them!—but please don't go outside the Munsey publications. There are plenty of Munsey stories to fill F.N. for many years to come.

Now that we've had "Man Who Mastered Time" we should soon have the last of Cummings' best trilogy—"The Fire People."

I'm very glad to see that "Earth's Last Citadel" is coming up. I missed it and I hear it's great.

Please hurry along the third Stilson story. And don't forget "Drink We Deep"—a great fantasy. As in every letter, I'll also ask for more by Flint, Garret Smith, O. A. Kline, Giesy, and Stevens.

It should be a sincere compliment to F.N. and F.F.M. to see the number of imitators now coming on the market. But they can't match up to the two originals. Nor do they have the storehouse of really rare and fine fantasy to draw from. May your two mags continue at the top—where they've been since their beginning.

DONALD V. ALLGEIER.
1851 Gerrard Ave.,
Columbus 12, Ohio.

REAL FANTASY

Intrigued by F.N.'s best cover since the September 1949 issue, I purchased the latest issue of your worthy magazine, and I was not in the least disappointed. In fact, I was delighted.

"Three Against the Stars" was an excellent story, enhanced by Finlay's beautiful artwork, and, above all, it *was* Fantasy! 1950 seems to be F.N.'s big year. First "The Flying Legion", then "The Man Who Mastered Time", and now this issue's classic. If you hold out like this for the next three issues, the readers are going to have a difficult time picking the best novel of the year.

I am glad to see my two favorite authors scheduled for the next issue, and I hope I'm not disappointed. I only heard of this tale lately.

"Fantasy Book Reviews" made one of its erratic appearances again and made me sorry we do not see it more often. The artist on page 88, Poulton, is new to me, but I like his work.

Also keep Saunders for covers; he does better than Lawrence and I think I even like him better than Finlay. But don't get me wrong; Finlay's still the master on the interior art.

ALLAN LEVERENTZ.
320 Stenzel St.,
N. Tonawanda, N.Y.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

ERIC NORTH PLEASES

When I picked up the May ish of F.N. I received a very pleasant surprise. Four whole stories, not one!

The novel, "Three Against The Stars", written by Eric North was to my estimation the best you-all have printed in the past several issues and I would like to hear from Mr. North again some time soon.

"A Priest Of Quiche" by James was *stinko*. Brother, was that so-called story ever rotten! Now, the short by Wallis was pretty fair although it certainly wasn't up to par for F.N. Oh, joy, but I certainly liked the Templeton story, "Mr. Primrose Goes to the Devil". Uh, has anyone got Lucifer's address? I might make a deal with him and get dumped on Mars with Hedy Lamar—sighhhhh. . . .

The art work, well . . . no, I won't say anything about it except the cover was not up to the usual Saunders level.

If someone wants some old *Argosies* I have a few 1925 and '26 issues and two '37 all in worse to still worse condition.

Wirez. Has anyone heard of this? You haven't well I'll tell you what Ima goin to do, Yes, Yes, Yes, I will so tell you.

W-I-R-E-Z what do those letters stand for, why nothing of course, any way we can figure it out can you. What is it, well that I can tell you, so here goes. Wirez is an organization for people who want to correspond the modern way, by sound therefore instead of correspondence with their friends they wirespond. That's it, give the man a flying saucer, a wirespondence club. Whats that you ask, why I just told you, yes its an organization for persons with wire recorders who want to correspond with others by wire.

If you want to know more of the rambling details drop me a line and I can help you find a wirespondent.

So long,
CHARLES H. HEISNER.

Box 285
Lynn Haven, Florida.

LIKES OUR ARTISTS

The May issue of F.N. arrived on my local newsstand a few hours ago. Of course, I haven't read it yet, but I shall before long.

I note "Earth's Last Citadel" is coming up in July, after a number of requests. All well and good—but—isn't the fundamental purpose of F.N. to bring us the early, rare Munsey classics? I *don't think* the stories of the late '30s are needed in F.N.; it's enough that they will appear in A.M.F.M. Let's keep 'em old!

In keeping with that suggestion, here are a number of fine Munsey stories, all from 1926-34, which are suitable for F.N. and most welcome to me: "The Prince of Peril" by Otis Kline and any others of that trilogy; "The Snow Girl", by Ray Cummings; "The Radio War" by R. M. Farley; "Radio Gun-Runners"

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

by Farley; "War of the Purple Gas" by Murray Leinster.

I am co-publisher, with Saul Diskin, of a fanzine called *Spaceship* which sells for five cents a copy. The current (April) issue features a 16-page mimeographed inside, with the latest in fan fiction and articles, inside a lithographed cover.

I need the following magazines in clean condition with both covers intact. If you have, please send price and description.

Fantastic Novels:—July, September, November 1940, April, 1941. *Famous Fantastic Mysteries:*—March, June, September 1945; March, September, December 1944. *Astounding* S-F:—Let me know what you have before 1946—two to one I need it! *Fantastic Adventures:*—Jan., April, July, October 1945; October 1944. *Amazing Stories,* August 1946 (and a lot before that!) *Captain Future:*—1943, Winter, Summer, Fall. 1942: Spring, Summer. *Future Fiction:*—Watcha got? I need it.

There's a lot more, but I'd rather not drag it all out here. I can't offer much in trade, except British *Astounding,* the British Edition of *Unknown,* and sundry other British stuff. If any of you need that sort of stuff, let me know and I'll have my British correspondents hunt it up for you. Prices on British promags run from 15 cents on *Unknown* and *Astounding* of the last few years up to about 50c for rarer issues of other mags.

A few things more in closing:—I like these new artists Popular Publications has been featuring. Calle is good, Van Dongen excellent, Poulton fine. Saunders is good on the cover. The unexpected appearance of a Paul illo was refreshing. How 'bout a cover by Paul for an s-f novel?

BOB SILVERBERG.

760 Montgomery St.,
Brooklyn 13, N.Y.

WANTS MORE PAUL PICS

Have just received and read the Jan. '50 issue of F.N. Thoroughly enjoyed England's yarn. Pity no space for readers' letters but the story was worth the sacrifice! March issue should be a good one too, with Cummings' story. Should like to see Victor MacClure's "Ultimatum" some time soon. Thought Paul's reappearance in Nov. issue too good to last—please, please, give us more of his work.

Have just completed my set of F.N.—two out of the first five featured Paul; can't you attain that frequency now? I think he could have illustrated "The Flying Legion" much more effectively; none of the Lawrence ones were anything to write home about—though the cover was pretty good. Best wishes.

NORMAN ASHFIELD.

27 Woodland Road,
Thornton Heath, Surrey, England.

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POLARIS and the GODDESS GLORIAN

(Continued from page 109)

I, Zenas Wright, now in my sixty-seventh year, and being in full possession of my health, mind, and faculties (as lawyers write it in the wills) having been asked by the writer of the foregoing work to make some comment on it, do hereby aver, asseverate, maintain, etc., that it is in the main a faithful account of certain events in which it has been my prvilege to play a small part. In fact, I cannot well do otherwise, seeing that I furnished him the information.

Such changes as I might be tempted to make in the history he has written would only vex the writer, and so I'll let it be. They would be in the nature of scientific details, anyhow, and I fear would make only dry reading for any but brother scientists.

I have told the author that he has made altogether too much of my part in the events which he has described. I am not a hero, and never will be; but in this description of that brush in the Kimbrian defile—which was altogether a matter of chance—he has made me almost heroic. I have asked him to amend the account; but he will not listen to it, and so I suppose that it will have to stand. I hereby disclaim it.

* * *

It is more than six months since the fademe *Oaron* dropped anchor in the Potomac (where its arrival created a fine sensation), and I landed once more in Washington. With me came Lieutenant Everson. He did not get to Adlaz until some weeks after it had been taken, and he's not the man yet that he was before he got that jab from Atlo's spear. But he's improving. He had the loss of a cruiser to report; but he brought with him a sum in gold and gems, sent by the king of Ruthar and Maeronica, sufficient to reimburse the Government for the loss of the ship, and with a splendid sum left over to be distributed among the relatives of those who went down with her. The king is a man who doesn't do things by halves.

Ensign Brooks came with us also. He was pining for a peep up Broadway and a whiff of "America's strongest cigarette." I hope that he has had enough to eat since he came back.

Through the kindness of Oleric, I was enabled to bring with me a splendid pair of mammoth's tusks, which I took great pleasure in adding to the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Some time I hope

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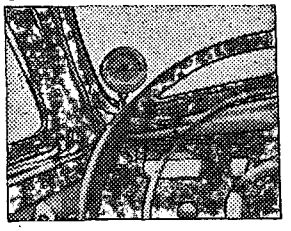

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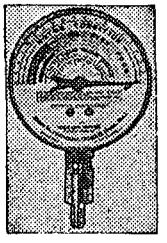

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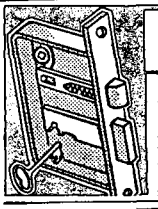

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to be the means of bringing to these shores specimens of the *Elephas primigenius* themselves, which the Rutharians call amalocs.

Before this history comes to the eyes of the world—if it ever does, of which I have some doubt—I shall have gone back to the south. I thought that I wanted to end my days in my home in Buffalo and be buried there; but I don't. I'm going back to be with my boy. He is making a wise ruler there in Adlaz. Perhaps an old man's life will not be altogether useless there, where there is so much to be done.

Before I left Adlaz, two small princes were playing in the royal palace—Patrymion, the boy of Minos, who eventually will be king if he lives, and another youngster, who must stagger through li under the burden of the name of Polar Zenas Janess. Guess that's pretty good for an old rock-splitter—to have the first-born son of a real king named after him. Constituting himself the special guardian of the two little chaps is a simple-minded little cockney sailor, whom Polaris found in prison, Jack Melton by name. Sunlight has cured him of some of his hallucinations, and he no longer hates Rombar.

There is one thing more, which I did not find in the history, and will now add here. It concerns that remarkable woman, Glorian of Ruthar. One day when we were discussing the power which she and Oleric declare they have to prolong their lives (privately, I think it is rank bosh), Glorian told me that it was possible for one who knew the secret to make use of it to keep another person alive, and without that person knowing about it. Now Glorian is living in Adlaz, where she has had the temple of Shamar fixed over to suit her. She sees Polaris often. I am of the opinion that, if she has any such power—mind you, I'm not admitting she has—she is using it on Polaris, and is planning to outwait Mrs. Janess (Queen Rose, I suppose I should call her) and eventually have him for herself. The outcome of this, only time will tell, and I shall not live to know it. I have not the means to prolong my life—and would not if I had.

By the way, Zoar of the Amalocs died shortly after the taking of Adlaz. The excitement of the war was too much for his heart.

Oh, yes! And Oleric married Bel-Ar's widow, the Queen Raissa; and that is all.

Good-by.

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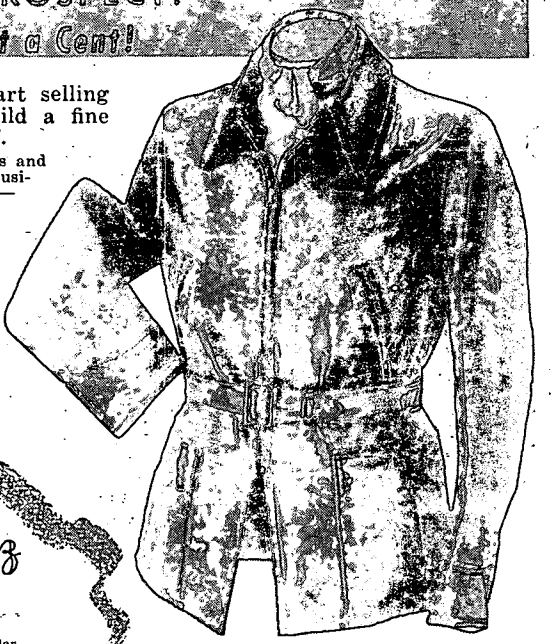

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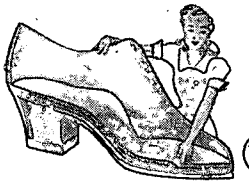

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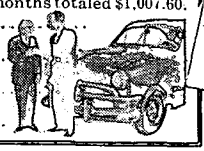

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